
APRIL
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10-STORY
ALL DIFFERENT!
DETECTIVE
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15¢
TO D.A's OFFICE
THE
NEW LOOK
IN
SHROUDS
by
H. Q. Masur



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The New

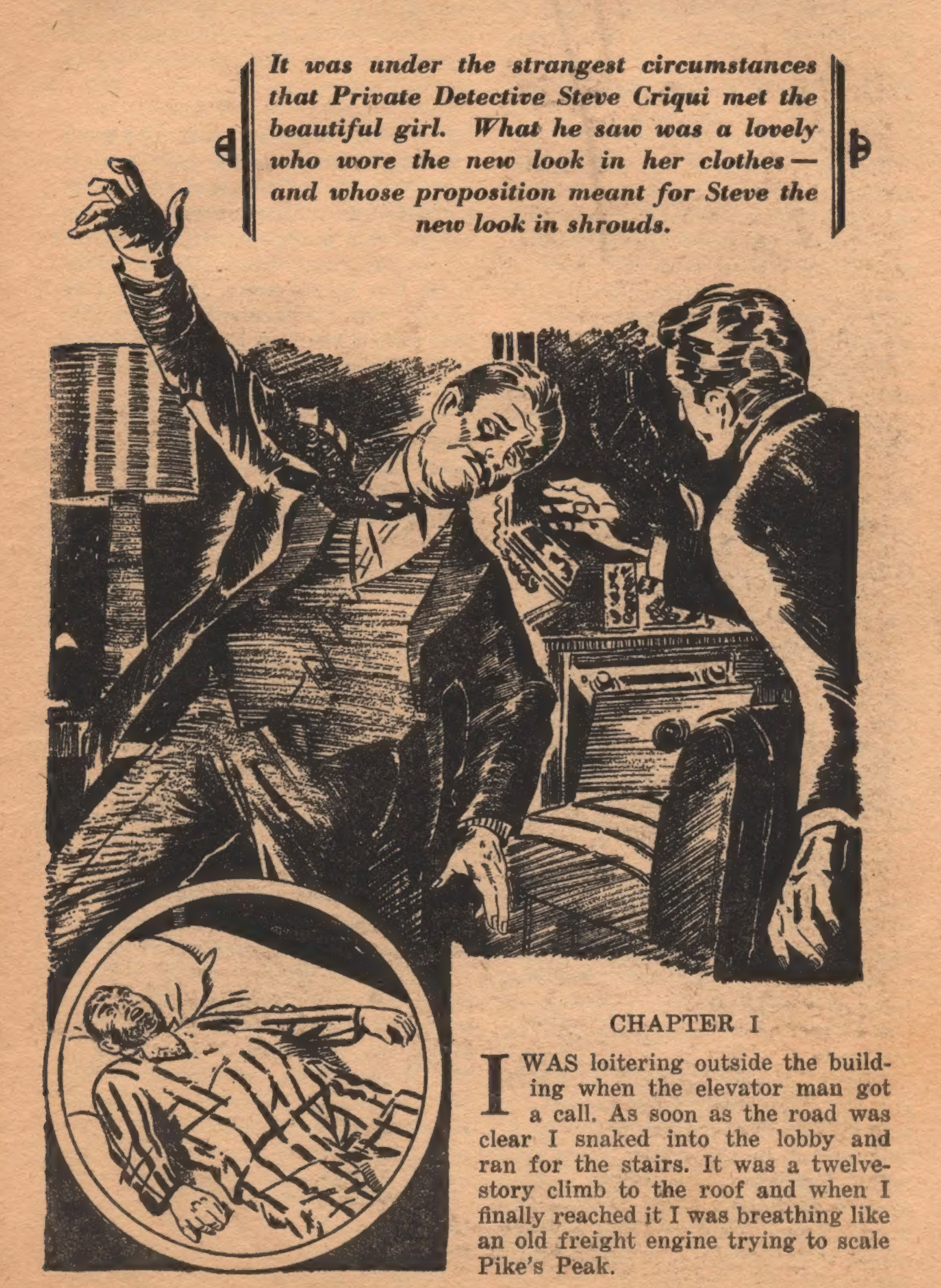
Unusual Detective Novelet

By H. Q. Masur



Look in Shrouds

It was under the strangest circumstances that Private Detective Steve Criqui met the beautiful girl. What he saw was a lovely who wore the new look in her clothes—and whose proposition meant for Steve the new look in shrouds.



CHAPTER I

I WAS loitering outside the building when the elevator man got a call. As soon as the road was clear I snaked into the lobby and ran for the stairs. It was a twelve-story climb to the roof and when I finally reached it I was breathing like an old freight engine trying to scale Pike's Peak.

I went to the edge and looked down.

The top floor tenant had a narrow terrace that ran along the front of the building. I could reach it by dropping off the parapet. I could also break a leg. It was an eighteen-foot drop and I'm no acrobat.

I made a quick survey.

Tar paper covered the roof. Radio antennas crisscrossed here and there on 2 x 4 standards. Vent pipes stuck up all around. Some old clothesline hung from a hook in the chimney; it was dried out and probably wouldn't hold a midget. The antennas were my dish. I broke one of the wires by bending it back and forth. Then I looped it securely around the nearest vent pipe and dropped it over the edge.

I wrapped a handkerchief around my hand and fed myself over the parapet. People on the streets gave the impression of crawling insects. It made me dizzy.

A human fly wouldn't mind, but I don't like heights.

For a second I hung there by my chin. If I fell anywhere I hoped it would be on the terrace. A strong gust of wind could blow me clear. I didn't like thinking about that.

Tightrope walkers and the daredevils who dive fifty feet into a barrel of water take worse chances, but that's their job.

I wasn't worried about people seeing me from across the street. Across the street was the Hudson River. The antenna wire began to pull thin like a piece of taffy and my heart suffered a violent spasm. I landed on the terrace with both feet, jarring my teeth.

I leaned against the building, allowing my pulse to become normal. A pair of French doors was partly open. The carpet in the living room was soft. Feminine bric-a-brac stood around here and there. There was zebra-striped furniture and a large rough stone fireplace. A professional decorator's job, and nobody had been trying to pinch pennies either.

My coming here like this was stretching the law. But people stretch the law every day, just crossing against a red light, or spitting in the subway. A guy does what he has to do to make a living.

THERE was a squat-legged bleached oak coffee table with a box of candy on it. I gave the candy a double-take. Grasshoppers, iguanas, lizards—all made out of chocolate.

I ate a grasshopper. It was pretty good. The inside was a little too soft maybe, but the legs—they were the best part. I tried an iguana. It tasted just like the grasshopper. Now I was thirsty.

I went over to the small pickled-pine bar and around it to the shelf that held a pyramid of glittering bottles. I selected one with the faded yellow label of some French monastic order, blackberry brandy. I unscrewed the cap and took a pull. Smooth, but authoritative. Those monks were in the wrong business. I got rid of the bottle.

There was work to be done.

First I searched the bedroom. You could tell that a girl lived here; everything from the bedspread to the array of perfume bottles on the vanity was strictly feminine. The bureau drawers yielded nothing, not even ten cents' worth of costume jewelry. I looked in the closets. She didn't have enough clothes to open a department store maybe, but she'd never have to go around naked either.

There was another room, a small guest room, uninhabited. The chest of drawers was emptier than Mother Hubbard's cupboard. I went back to the living room, studiously avoiding the bar. A breakfront secretary failed to give me anything I could use. I stood there for a moment, deciding it was time to make an exit.

The service stairs would be in the back, through the kitchen. I found the kitchen and the rear door and I went out and was closing the door behind me when the service elevator

slid open and a middle-aged woman with a face like a persimmon stepped into the hall, carrying a bag of groceries. Her eyes sharpened with suspicion at the sight of my hand on the knob.

"What is it, young man?" she demanded sharply. "What do you want?"

The elevator man put a beady eye on me. Maybe there were a lot of sneakthieves around lately.

"Nobody answered the bell," I said, smiling innocently.

"Nobody's home, that's why. You're at the wrong door anyway. Did you want to see Miss Preisic?"

I nodded brightly. "Yes, ma'am."

"Come in then. She'll be home any minute."

She herded me through the kitchen and into the drawing room and sat me down on a zebra-striped sofa with the admonition to stay right there. I intended to bolt through the front door the instant I was alone.

I never got the chance. The bell rang and she hustled to open the door. I was trapped.

"There's a man wants to see you," I heard the maid tell someone.

A girl came into the room. I blinked at her. She had everything. She was tall and lissom, with a graceful figure under a green satin dress that clung to her body like an ardent young bridegroom waiting for his induction papers. Black hair was parted in the center and fell loosely to her shoulders. Her face was pale, her mouth inviting, her eyes dark and lustrous. She looked me over very slowly, from toes to head.

"You want to see me?" Her voice had a slight foreign accent, the kind you'd call Continental, quite pleasant, in the way that Ingrid Bergman's or Marlene Dietrich's voice is pleasant.

I swallowed. It felt like a baseball going down. "Yes, ma'am."

"That will do, Hilda," she told the woman with the persimmon face.

When we were alone, she placed her alligator bag down on the table next to the chocolate-covered animals and peeled off a pair of doeskin gloves, flicking her fingers into the air. "Stand up, please."

I stood up.

She gave me another careful appraisal, walking around me twice. My temperature was beginning to go up like fever on a hospital chart and I was sweating a little.

"You may sit down now," she said.

I sat. I didn't say anything. I let her carry the ball.

She smiled again. "You came in answer to my ad, I suppose."

"Your ad—er—yes, ma'am." I almost fumbled that one.

"You must have bought a very early edition of the afternoon paper," she said. "I didn't expect a response so soon."

I crossed my fingers and hoped she'd give me a clue.

She did. "Rather clever, wasn't it? 'Young man wanted. Single, adventurous, willing.' " She paused. "Since you're here, I presume you fill all those requirements. Have you ever been married, Mr.—er—"

"Criqui — Steve Criqui," I said. "No, ma'am. Single all my life."

Her frown betrayed a sudden concern. "Criqui?" she echoed. "That's rather an odd name."

"Yes, ma'am."

She said anxiously, "Is it—I mean, are you an American?"

"As American as corn on the cob. I was born in Pocatello, Idaho." I did not add that my great grandfather had been a full-blooded Shoshoni Indian, and chief of his tribe, according to an old family legend.

Her face cleared with relief. "How old are you, Steve?"

"Twenty-six."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm an eclipse photographer."

"A—what?" Her expression was perplexed.

"I set up my camera," I explained,

"and every seven years when there's an eclipse, I snap a picture."

"Oh, I understand," she said in a soft voice, giving me a look of earnest sympathy. "You're out of a job."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Would you like a drink?"

I nodded eagerly.

She went over to the bar and brought me a long hooker of the blackberry brandy. "You don't mind my asking all these questions, do you, Steve?"

"You're the boss. You have a right to know about a prospective employee."

"Good. Tell me, have you ever been arrested?"

"Once," I said. "Assault and battery. I hit a cop."

That finished her smile.

"It was really self-defense," I said. "This cop picked me up last year on a vagrancy charge and then got browned off when they found three hundred dollars in my shoe. I only hit him with my fist; it could have been a Stillson wrench."

"Have you any money left, Steve?"

"Fifteen cents."

"Where do you live?"

"In Bryant Park. It's not too bad this time of the year. Better anyway than a wet foxhole with a dead Dutchman in it for company."

She shook her head. "There's not much future in that, is there, Steve?"

"There's no future in anything," I said laconically. "You live and you die. How important what happens in between depends on the individual."

"Don't you have ambition?"

"Sure. To die with money in the bank. That's the ambition of every red-blooded young American, isn't it?"

"Now you sound bitter."

"Bitter?" I said. "Me? Hell, no. Where else on God's wonderful green footstool can a man stand up and say what he wants to say without getting his head chopped off?"

She took the time to light a cigarette before asking the next question. "Have you had much schooling, Steve?"

"Enough. A college degree you couldn't eat between two slices of sandwich bread."

SHE allowed smoke to leak out of nostrils. She was silent, lost in some private contemplation of her own. I tried my luck on the blackberry brandy while she thought it over. After a moment she nodded abruptly to indicate that she had reached a decision. Her eyes came level with mine.

She said, "How would you like to earn five thousand dollars?"

I blinked at her. "I beg your pardon."

She leaned forward intently. "It's easy work, Steve."

"How easy?" I asked, trying to keep the skepticism out of my voice, and out of my face, too.

"All you have to do is marry me."

She caught me 'way off base on that one. If a trap door on the sofa had suddenly opened and dropped me down a coal chute to the basement, I could not have been more astounded. My eyes protruded like eggshells. I stuck my finger in my ear and shook it.

"What did you say?"

She repeated. "All you have to do is marry me."

A bubble of air burst in my throat. "That's what I thought you said." I felt as groggy as a boxer who's just had a haymaker bounced off his ear.

"I mean it, Steve," she said earnestly, her eyes unwavering. "I want you to become my husband."

Some of the blackberry sloshed over on my pants. I put it down on the table and said, "You're kidding."

She gripped my sleeve. "I was never more serious in my life, Steve."

What the hell was she trying to sell me?

Her fingers tightened. Her face wore a look of intense entreaty. Her eyes were mute with appeal. "Will you, Steve? *Please.*"

Imploring. Begging. This beautiful creature, wealthy, desirable, with everything a man could possibly want. But why me? Why pick on me?

Until now I had been stalling. Waiting for a chance to get out of there. Now I was interested. Something obviously was in the wind.

"What's the catch?" I said.

"No catch." Her voice was breathless. "All you have to do is marry me, in a couple of months you can get a divorce, then you'll be free again and richer by five thousand dollars."

Five thousand fish is a nice sum. A man could buy a piece of land and raise chickens or tomatoes or pine trees. Five thousand dollars would give me a vacation in Florida or Acapulco. And I didn't have to commit murder for it. All I had to do was marry a beautiful girl.

It stuck in the drain, for my money.

"Elaborate, please," I said. "What's it all about?"

"Do you have to know?"

"You bet I have to know. I'm not marching into a deal like this blindfolded. How do I know I'm not being rigged as the patsy for somebody's brainstorm?"

She chewed her lip indecisively.

"Look," I said. "You just proposed and it isn't even leap year. And I don't know your first name."

"Flora—Flora Preisic."

"All right, Flora," I said, settling back and crossing my knees. "I'm listening. Let's have it."

She was working her fingers together, fishing for the right words. Finally she sat erect. "I'm going to take you into my confidence, Steve. Can you keep a secret?"

"Sure."

THE words tumbled out in a rush. "It's just that—you see—I'm here in this country illegally. I came from Hungary, without a visa or a passport. I'm afraid I'll be deported. If I marry an American citizen I can go to Canada and be admitted from there. I love this country. I want to stay here. For this privilege I'm willing to pay five thousand dollars."

"Why select me?"

"Because I trust you."

"Thanks," I said dryly. "However, that doesn't work both ways."

"I—I don't understand . . ."

"Well, now," I said patiently, "look. You're something special, Flora. You're no assembly line product. You've got everything. The men in this town aren't exactly blind. I can't believe a girl like you hasn't got any boy friends."

"Oh, but I do." Her prompt reply was accompanied by an emphatic nod. "I have a fiancé. We're engaged."

Now I was lost. "What's wrong with the guy? Why doesn't he marry you?"

"It wouldn't do any good." She gestured helplessly. "He's not a citizen either."

"He here illegally too?"

"Oh, no. Paul came in under the quota. He's applied for citizenship, but you know how long it takes to get your final papers."

"And is Paul willing to let you marry another man?"

She shrugged. "Naturally he doesn't like the idea. But what can we do? Our hands are tied. Besides, it's only for a short time."

"I see. And what does Paul do for a living?"

"Paul Vanamann is my business partner. We manufacture candy animals for children." She pointed to the box on the table. "That's our product. I'm in charge of the factory and Paul handles the distribution."

I sat back and chewed it over. I surveyed it top and bottom. It wasn't what I had come here for, but it sounded on the level. The thing might develop along highly interesting lines. What's more, five thousand dollars was nothing to sneeze at. And in the end I might get a line on that other stuff.

I might get hurt too. But I might also make a lot more money. You nev-

er get anything just sitting back in a rocking chair. And what's to stop the ceiling from falling on your head while you're sitting listening to the radio?

"Well, Steve, what do you say? Five thousand dollars . . ." She was so pathetically eager.

"It's a deal," I said.

She was jubilant. She clapped her hands with delight, her face aglow, her eyes swimming in quick moisture. A tear glistened on her eyelash. But it was a tear of happiness.

"Thank you, Steve," she whispered. "That calls for a drink."

She got the bottle of blackberry brandy and another glass for herself. We clinked glasses. We drank. It brightened her considerably and put color into her cheeks.

"When can you be ready, Steve?"

"I'm ready now. We can apply for a license today and drive up to Connecticut and get hitched without delay."

The way she looked at me, I felt like a combination Sir Galahad and Errol Flynn.

"One thing more," I said. "Where am I supposed to live while this thing lasts?"

Her eyes grew embarrassed in a pink-flushed face. Before she could answer, the bell rang and the maid went to the door, appearing in a moment to say, "Mr. Welles is here," in a highly distasteful tone.

Flora Preisic stopped being happy. I caught the quick flash of alarm in her eyes. The nervous fluttering of her hands expressed an inner agitation. She struggled to bring herself under control and managed a casual smile, though it took a bit of muscular effort.

"Business," she said apologetically. "Would you wait in here, please?"

CHAPTER II

SHE hustled me through a door that led into a small dining room. The instant the latch clicked behind her, I eased it back and pulled the door open again. Not much, just a crack that gave me an angled view of the drawing room.

He looked like a man reincarnated from a bear. He was thick-chested and unwieldly, and he walked with the lumbering gait of a bear on its hind legs. His face was broad and dark-whiskered; wire-wool hair grew low over porcine eyes. He carried a derby hat in his hand.

"Sam Welles," he said in a low mocking voice. "At your service."

I saw Flora's spine grow rigid. "What is it, Sam? What do you want?"

"The usual thing, my dear. That common denominator of all man's ills." A gold tooth winked out of his smile as he rotated his forefinger over his thumb.

It wrung a wail out of Flora. "But I just gave you a thousand dollars."

He shrugged. "That was last week. A man has to live."

"But you promised. You said you wouldn't trouble me again for a long time."

"I'm a terrible liar," he grinned. "Not to be trusted for an instant."

She stamped her foot. Actually. "I'm not going to give it to you."

"I don't see that you have any choice in the matter, my dear Flora," he murmured, keeping his voice low. "Budapest is quite different these days. I don't think you'd like it there. The cafés, the night life, the laughter —all those are things of the past."

Her shoulders sagged. Her voice was toneless. "How much do you want this time?"

"Oh" — he pursed his lips — "another thousand will hold me."

"I haven't that much money here, Sam."

"Give me what you have and send the rest to my hotel. The Marvin."

She was anxious to get rid of him. She fished some bills out of her purse and stuffed them into his hand. I needed no blueprint to understand this setup. Sam Welles knew her se-

cret and was blackmailing her.

Now I knew why she was rushing me into this thing.

To end the squeeze and erase the fear of deportation. I was willing to go along with her on that. Mr. Welles was due for a shock. When she entered the country as my wife, his easy touch would be over. There'd be nothing to tap. Unless it was me tapping the end of his nose with a fistful of knuckles.

The thought surprised me. Why was I so willing to defend her? She had a boy friend. Let him do it.

I KNEW something else too. Flora Preisic was capable of taking care of herself. According to what I had heard, she wasn't so noble. I'd have to be on my toes all along. If I relaxed I might finish off with my toes turned up—permanently.

Sam Welles, his gold tooth winking between his lips, moved backward to the door and placed his derby flat against his chest.

"You understand, Flora," he said, bowing slightly. "Not later than tonight."

Then he was gone.

She found me perched on the dining room table, contemplating a ring of cigarette smoke that had flattened itself against the ceiling, and looking as innocent as a pickpocket at work.

"Let's not wait," she blurted. "Let's do it right away, Steve."

"Okay. I'm ready."

She was flushed with excitement. "Can you drive a car?"

"Yep."

"It's in a garage on Eighty-first and Columbus," she said, digging a set of keys out of her purse. "I'll phone and tell them to have it ready. Go over there and get it and I'll join you downstairs in fifteen minutes."

I took the keys and went down to the street. A block from the garage I stopped off and used the phone booth in a drugstore. A man's voice, harsh and abrupt, answered on the second ring.

"Criqui speaking," I said.

"What took you so long?" he demanded. "Have you got the stuff?"

"Not yet. She doesn't keep it around the house."

"Nonsense. It must be there. I know it's there."

"Well, I couldn't find it. You'll have to give me a little more time. I'm working on another angle."

"Pah! I'll make it my business to see her and have a real showdown."

"Now wait," I protested. "Listen—"

But I was talking into a dead line. He hung up. I shrugged and finished my journey to the garage. The car was waiting. It was a dream, a canary yellow convertible with white-wall tires, radio, heater, fog lights, and everything. I slid behind the wheel and touched the starter. The engine whispered at me.

I closed my eyes and opened them. Nothing had disappeared. The car was real. This was no pipe smoker's dream.

Flora was coming out just as I drove up to the house. She was wearing a silver fox neckpiece and a hat that hung on the side of her gleaming black head like a drunken butterfly. She ran across the sidewalk and then paused with her fingers on the door handle to watch a blue sedan that was turning the corner. It rolled to a stop with its bumper kissing the canary yellow convertible.

A tall chap ducked out and reached Flora in two long strides. There was an affectionate look in his eyes as he bent down to kiss her cheek. He had the face for a collar ad. Handsome, chiseled, with a dimple in his chin big enough to hold a marble. Light hair swept back in marcelled waves from a tall forehead.

In a way it was funny. I'm on my way to marry the girl and here she is, kissing another guy.

He flicked a questioning glance at me, eyebrows riding high over his nose.

"This is Steve Criqui," she told him. "The man who answered my ad. We're going to do it now, right away, Paul."

He searched my face. "Why all the haste?"

Her voice went down to a whisper. "We mustn't wait. Sam Welles was here again."

"More money?"

"Another thousand."

His lower lip bulged thoughtfully behind his tongue. "Yes, I suppose it's the only way."

"We're driving up to Greenwich," she said.

HE CAME over and turtled his neck through the car window and brought me into sharp-eyed focus. "You understand the arrangements, Criqui? Everything is quite clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you agree?"

"I'd agree to anything for five thousand bucks."

"Good." He turned back to Flora. "When will you be home, darling?"

"Sometime tonight."

He smiled ruefully, "I'll be waiting. Bless you, my children." He bestowed another kiss upon her cheek and she moved impatiently toward the car.

She was waving to him as I moved away from his sedan and sent the car ahead to a symphony of grinding gears. I tooled over to the West Side Highway and drove downtown, skimming smoothly along the Hudson. The car responded like a living animal. Flora sat silently at my side, lost in her own private thoughts.

I parked near the Municipal Building. We went up to the Marriage License Bureau and filled in an application. A ten-dollar tip accelerated the report on a blood test. With the formalities disposed of, we returned to the car and I nosed it up-state to the Sawmill River Parkway.

There was a mellow fragrance in the air and the trees were incredibly green. Under humming tires the concrete ribbon of road unraveled through the stubby foothills. Overhead the sky was cobalt blue, with smoke-gray cloud ruffles here and there. The convertible ate up the miles as the wind rustled past us.

"You know, Steve," Flora said with a sigh, "this is the first time in weeks that my mind has been at ease."

"Yeah. That Welles bird really had you wriggling on the hook."

She turned toward me sharply, high color filling her face. Anger in her eyes, an accusing edge in her voice. "You eavesdropped. You were listening at the door. You heard everything."

"Uh-huh."

"Steve, you had no right—"

"I had every right in the world. I'm the man you're going to marry, remember. I saw fear in your face when the maid announced Welles. I wanted to know what was cooking."

"But I told you—"

"Okay. I was merely checking. What I heard helped fill in the picture. Now I know why the matter can't rest, why you have to act without delay. All right. I'm still willing to play my part."

The blood dissolved from her cheeks, leaving them a little pale, and her teeth relinquished their grip on her underlip. I was watching her through the rear-view mirror and I saw the little smile that was meant for me.

When she had settled back, relaxed, I said, "Tell me something about yourself, Flora. How long have you been in the States?"

"Ever since the war."

"How'd you work it?"

"There was an underground that helped lots of people get in at the time—through Canada and Mexico."

I nodded admiringly. "You were clever to get all your money out of Europe."

"But I didn't, Steve. I came here without a penny."

I GAVE myself a mental pat on the back. I was channeling the conversation toward the subject that interested me. And she was rising to nibble the bait. I put a double wrinkle of puzzlement between my eyes.

"How about all this—the car, the apartment, the candy business?"

Amusement touched her lips. "There are many ways of making money besides digging ditches."

I shot her a startled look. "Such as—"

"And not what you think, either," she chided, slapping my knee playfully.

"Look here," I said sternly. "A wife has to tell her husband everything."

"I'm not your wife yet."

"You will be in less than an hour."

She laughed. She leaned back and put her hand through the open window, feeling the wind drag. "I'll tell you. It's really quite simple. You see, Steve, before the war there were several Hungarian utility companies that issued bonds through a certain American banking firm. This firm also guaranteed payment of the bonds. But the people in Europe who own them have no way of collecting. By using American money, friends of mine in Budapest were able to buy them up at a fraction of their value. They were sent to me here and I put them through for collection. At a substantial profit."

"That's the way to do it," I said. "It's a real pleasure to hear about someone diddling the bankers."

"But it's all perfectly legal, Steve," she added with a one-sided smile.

"Sure," I said. "Any of these bonds lying around loose now?"

She laughed nicely. "No, but I expect a shipment almost any day."

Casually I asked, "Where did you get the money in the first place to send to your friends in Budapest?"

Just fishing. I knew the answer.

Caution wiped her face blank. "It was—why, there are men here who were willing to back me. Speculators who liked to make their money work for them, who became my partner in the deal."

Speculator was a nice polite word for gambler.

So far as she was concerned, that ended the subject.

I suddenly remembered something as we drove through a small town, and I braked in front of a five- and ten-cent store, and went in and bought a plain brass wedding band.

Evening shadows came down as we reached the outskirts of Greenwich. I parked in front of a white frame house that had a sign nailed to the front porch reading:

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE

He had store teeth and no more hair on his head than a Florida grapefruit. But he knew how to read the Bible, which was all that mattered. He had a wife with a great pneumatic bosom who acted as a witness and kept giggling through the whole ceremony.

Funny thing: I felt no emotion. A guy doesn't get married every day in his life, yet there were no butterflies in my stomach. No hot flashes. No nervousness. I didn't feel like a groom at all. I could have been a guy buying his girl a strawberry soda.

The thing required less time than a dentist would take to pull a tooth.

When it was over, I kissed her. I had intended only a brief salute, but the affair developed and in one minute I plummeted ten thousand feet hanging onto a snagged parachute. . . .

CHAPTER III

OUR headlamps stabbed twin fingers of light through the country darkness as we drove back. During the first half of the trip, Flora was strangely silent.

"Why did you do that?" she asked finally in her quiet voice.

"Do what?"

"Kiss me like that?"

"Oh, just to cement our friendship."

"I—I rather liked it, Steve."

"Why?" I said. "Doesn't Vanamann know how?"

Her teeth almost made her lips bleed. Her voice broke. "That—that was a cruel thing to say, Steve."

"Okay," I said gruffly. "Forget it. I'm sorry. Maybe I'm not used to being married."

That finished the conversation all the way back to town. I was looking forward to seeing Vanamann with no pleasure at all. As it turned out, I didn't have to see him. Somebody else was waiting for Flora in the drawing room.

Two people, as a matter of fact. Both male.

The younger one didn't count. He was supercargo. A pale thin specimen in a suit with high pants and a low jacket. I glanced at his face. You could find more expression on a manhole cover.

The older man spied me and his pupils glittered between horizontal slits. He was small and stout and dandy, with a saddle-shaped nose and a neatly twisted mustache. He turned to Flora and smiled, if you can call the mechanical distortion of his lips a smile.

"We've been waiting a long time, Flora," he said, purringly. The way a tiger who'd been skipped at feeding time would purr. "Where have you been?"

"Getting married," she told him in a matter-of-fact voice. "This is my husband—Steve Criqui."

It threw him. He was really staggered. His eyebrows soared up his forehead like a brace of startled pigeons and his lips unloaded the smile.

"Your husband?" His voice was incredulous.

"Yes," said Flora, annoyed. "What is so strange about that?"

"When—when did you meet him?"

"Does it make any difference?"

He brought himself under control and pinched out another smile. "None at all, my dear. Your personal life is your own affair."

He swung around and gave me a palm that felt like a handful of suet. "Victor Sweet is my name, sir. You are indeed fortunate. Flora is a remarkable girl; yes, sir, a very remarkable girl. My congratulations. Take care of her. *And of yourself, too.*"

WITH heavy emphasis on the last sentence. An emphasis laden with malice. I knew Victor Sweet. I knew him as a man who would bet on anything from the state of the weather to a presidential election. I didn't trust him. He was my client. From the look on his face it might be more accurate to put that in the past tense.

He didn't trust me, either.

He switched his gaze to Flora. The smile on his mouth failed to reach his eyes. "I am hoping that you anticipated my visit. Are the bonds ready?"

She shook her head. "They're not here, Victor."

"Not here?"

"No. They haven't arrived yet."

"Come now," he said sharply, "you can hardly expect me to believe that. I gave you the money over two months ago. Always, before this, your friends got the bonds to us in a matter of weeks. Why the delay?"

"I don't know," she said. "They just haven't arrived yet."

"You're lying."

She shrugged indifferently. "Think what you like."

"You're trying to pull a fast one." Victor was containing himself with difficulty. "But you're not going to get away with it."

"Don't be nasty, Victor."

"Nasty?" His voice thickened. "There's forty thousand dollars involved in this deal. I wouldn't trust my own mother. Cut stalling, Flora, and produce those bonds."

"I haven't got them."

Anger stitched his lips tight and he reached over and clutched her wrist. He was fast losing control.

"Look, sister, we're going to reach an understanding right now—"

That was as far as he got. Flora did not appreciate being manhandled. She lashed out with her free hand and caught him a resounding wallop across the jaw. Victor Sweet fell back. His hand wandered lonesomely up to his bruised cheek. Malignant red veins forked across his eyeballs and his mouth was a tight ring of white skin in a face the color of chalk.

"Max!" he bleated at the pale young man.

Max advanced on Flora. There was nothing particularly menacing in his expression, but you never can tell with a face like that. I reached out with my fingers and grabbed his thin neck, stopping him short like a lassoed steer. He started to twist and I put pressure on his windpipe.

His color went from fog-gray to rich purple. He worked his mouth and finally got it wired for sound, but mostly it was static. Gasping for breath.

I knew what he was after when he began pawing under his coat, and I took it away from him.

IT WAS a .457 Magum, probably the hardest hitting piece of hand artillery ever manufactured. A mighty big weapon for such a little guy but he probably needed every caliber of it. I sent him pirouetting across the floor and back into a nest of pillows on the sofa, where he tried to annihilate me with his eyes.

Victor Sweet was literally gnashing his teeth. "You're in this plot with her, Criqui. You're going to pay for this."

"Good night, Mr. Sweet," I said. "You know the way."

"Listen, you—"

"Hit the road," I said.

"Criqui," he spluttered, "I'll break you for this if it's the last thing I ever do. You—"

"Go on, get lost."

He was utterly incapable of speech. I got a blue glare that must have agitated every seismograph in the country. Then his jaw snapped, the muscles rigid with determination, and he spun on his heel and stalked toward the door.

"You forgot your clown," I called after him.

The pale young man shot me a murderous look and followed his employer.

Flora's face cleared with relief. "Why, Steve," she said with a breathless sigh, "you're a handy man to have around."

"Sure," I said. "You didn't think I was going to let anybody annoy my wife." A sudden thought struck me. "Hey, maybe I ought to get paid extra for serving as your bodyguard."

"What would you like?"

"Something to eat."

"A wedding feast," she laughed. "Let's raid the refrigerator."

We found half a roast, a turkey leg, a jar of caviar, and a loaf of rye bread. I ate steadily for twenty minutes and washed it down with a bottle of Canadian ale. Then I leaned back and saw that Flora was observing me reflectively.

"What's on your mind?" I asked her.

"You. You're out of a job and you haven't any place to sleep. I think you'd better stay here until this business is concluded."

That opened some interesting possibilities. "Will the sofa hold me?"

"Hilda will prepare a cot in the dining room."

"Oh," I said, sounding disappointed.

"You must be tired, Steve. I'll tell her to get it ready."

A half hour later I was set for bed. I broke open the big gun, shucked out the shells, and stored everything on a table top.

Lying prone on the cot, I reviewed the day's events. Here I was married. But it took the prospect of five thousand dollars to break the habits of a lifetime. Even so, it was nutty.

I thought of Victor Sweet and shiv-

ered a little. He really thought I had doublecrossed him in some way. I'd have to see him first thing in the morning and put him straight.

Sweet belied his name. He was a ruthless sort of bird, vicious, vindictive, venomous, without pity or conscience, capable of almost any barbarity. A man to shun. There was a rumor that he kept two killers busy doing piecework, but it was probably an exaggeration. My big mistake was getting involved with him in the first place. In tough times, however, you accept any job that offers.

I fell asleep. . . .

VOICES awakened me. They were loud voices, raised in argument. A girl's voice, shrill and bitter; then a man's, harsh and snarling. I sat bolt upright and cocked my ear. The words were indistinguishable, muffled behind doors.

I threw my feet over the bed and wriggled into my pants. I was moving toward the door on tiptoe when the argument came to an abrupt conclusion.

The silence that followed was ominous.

I pulled open the door and went into the drawing room. Nobody. I crossed over and tried the master bedroom. Still nobody. I went back and stepped into the kitchen. Somebody.

Flora. Lying on the floor, supine and motionless, with her eyes wide open, but seeing nothing, her thick hair spread out in black strands over the linoleum. There was a savage bruise over her left temple. An iron skillet lay on the floor beside her.

I stood rooted. My Adam's apple rammed hard against my throat. My stomach was a cold knot tied in a wet rope tangled by fear and anger.

I stood there, feeling numb. Then I bent down and touched her. She was unresponsive. Clenched teeth made my jaws ache. Still I didn't move. What was the use? Whoever had killed her would be gone. A murderer doesn't linger near his victim. My scalp began to crawl as I saw a door against the far wall begin to slide open.

I thought it was a pantry door. It wasn't. The maid with the persimmon face had a small room there.

She took it all in with one frightened glance. Her piercing scream prickled the hair on the back of my neck. Her mouth was a dark puncture in a face made hideous by shock.

"You—you killed her!" she gasped. "You killed her!"

She whirled back into her room and the door slammed and a bolt clicked.

I looked down at Flora again. Even in death she was beautiful. And Steve Criqui was a bachelor again. He was single—with a vengeance.

I moved back and knocked on the maid's door. "Hilda."

She was babbling in there to herself.

"Hilda," I said, rattling the knob, "I want to talk to you."

It was no use. For all she knew I was a killer, intent on obliterating a witness. My legs felt like a pair of wooden stilts taking me to the telephone in the drawing room. I would have a sweet job explaining this one to the cops.

But the line was busy; the maid had beat me to it. She had an extension in her room and she was blurting it all out, begging them to hurry, crying there was a murderer in the apartment.

I dropped the phone and sank into a chair. My sins were coming home to roost.

CHAPTER IV

IN a town like New York, the Homicide Bureau moves fast. Sirens cut a hole through traffic and squad cars travel at better than fifty miles an hour. In no time at all they came barging through the door.

Detective Lieutenant Owen McConaughy was in charge. McConaughy knew me. "Criqui!" His face

grew long and stiff. "I might have guessed," he said bitterly. "Where's that woman who called in?"

They found her and brought her to the lieutenant. She took one look at me, uncorked another scream, and fainted. The blood fell out of her face and she tilted back into their arms. It made me feel like Dracula's ghost.

The next half hour was one of frenzied activity filled with popping flash bulbs, fingerprint powder, and searching for clues. When the place was finally cleared out, McConaughy and one of his men sat me in a chair and began to rifle through my story.

"Now, Criqui," the lieutenant said, "you're a private detective. You operate by virtue of a license issued by the Secretary of the State of New York and its continued existence depends upon the good will of the police department. I know things haven't been going so well with you and I want to give you every break. I'm going to ask you some questions and you're going to give me full and honest answers. One hint of evasion or chicanery and I'll eight-ball you so fast your head will rock. Am I clear?"

I nodded. McConaughy was a slender man with shrewd, intelligent eyes and a receding hairline. His approach to crime was realistic. Ninety-five percent of all murders, he had once remarked, were the direct cause of cupidity or jealousy, in that order. Simple affairs with prosaic backgrounds.

This one was going to break his jaw.

He looked at me. "First question, Criqui. What were you doing here?"

"In this apartment?"

"That's what I said."

"Why not, lieutenant? The deceased was my wife."

McConaughy threw his head back and gave me a double-take. His eyes narrowed. He wiped a hand slowly across his mouth and leaned forward to put a finger against my chest.

"You know me, Criqui," he said in a deliberately controlled voice. "The cop without a sense of humor. I'm not amused."

"It's the truth." I reached into my pocket. "Take a look at this, my marriage certificate."

He read with rapidly accumulating astonishment. "I'll be damned! When did this happen?"

"Today."

"When did you meet the girl?"

"This afternoon."

He almost choked. He walked around my chair and then stood spread-legged in front of me.

"All right," he said thinly. "I'm listening. Open the bag and dump it. From the beginning. The whole thing. Don't cut any corners."

Lieutenant McConaughy was a man who could smell a lie before it got spoken. He waited in tight-lipped silence.

"Flora Preisic was an alien," I said, "in this country without a visa or a passport. Scared witless of being deported. She had an idea if she married a citizen she could be legally admitted as his wife. So she ran an ad in the paper, asking for a volunteer."

"And you saw it?"

"I heard about it."

I DIDN'T tell him *how* I heard about it. It was none of his business that Victor Sweet had hired me to case the apartment for a small fortune in foreign bonds. Victor Sweet had been my client, maybe he still was; the least I could do was keep him clear.

"So you married her," McConaughy said with caustic derision.

"For a price."

"How much?"

"She promised me five grand."

I got the full benefit of his cynical stare while an idea grew behind his eyes and his face became tighter than the vault door on the First National Bank. His right fist smacked solidly into his left palm. There was a look on his face I didn't like. There was the sound of his voice, too.

"But after you married her you

had a better idea, didn't you, Criqui? Five grand," he said with gloomy derison. "What's that when she had so much more—a successful candy business, money in the bank, an expensive car? And all yours if she died. As her husband, it would go to you. So you decided to dump her without delay. Only you got a bad break. The maid came out and caught you standing over her body."

"Are you kidding?" I said in amazement.

"What do *you* think?"

"I think you're going soft between the ears, lieutenant. How do you know I'll inherit her money? Maybe she left a will. Maybe she left it to charity."

He smiled tightly. "Will or no will, you'd still come in for a third. It figures, Criqui. Who else had anything to gain?"

I spluttered indignantly. "Lots of people."

"For instance?" He watched me with shrewdly hooded eyes. He knew I was holding out on him and he was going to squeeze it out of me one way or another.

I said, "That's your job, lieutenant. I hardly knew the girl. Investigate her background, her business, her friends. You'd be surprised what'll turn up."

"Why should I?"

"To find the killer."

"I got the killer."

"Carramba!" I exclaimed, clapping my forehead. "Be sensible, will you?"

"Boy!" he said with grim-faced relish. "This is one time you peeled it too close. I knew you were going to step out of line sooner or later. You're going to short circuit two thousand volts for this caper. Wait till you see what the D.A. can do with it." He kissed his fingertips. "Goodby, Criqui."

He might make it stick at that. Crazier things have happened. Innocent men have been squared down in the electric armchair. I began to feel warm, my shirt collar was wilting.

"Look," I said urgently, "I was in the dining room, sleeping, and I heard her having an argument out here with some guy. The maid must have heard it too. Ask her about that, why don't you?"

"We did. She couldn't catch the drift but she said it sounded like your voice."

"She's hysterical," I bleated.

"She'll be a lot calmer in the witness chair before a blue ribbon jury."

I finger-combed my hair nervously. "There's still a matter of fingerprints, lieutenant. You'll never find mine on that skillet."

"We'll never find anybody's." His tone was biting sarcastic. "You wiped them off."

"The killer wiped them off, not me. I didn't touch the thing."

HE PINCHED out a miniscule smile. "You're living in a dream world, Criqui, if you think you can wriggle clear with a bunch of denials. Why don't you face it? Stop wasting our time and come clean."

"You haven't got a thing on me."

"We've got motive, means, and opportunity. And we'll get more."

I started to heave out of the chair and he shoved me back. "You'll never make it stick," I said without conviction. "You're trying to solve this case by guess and you're all wet."

He shrugged. "Maybe you're right. And maybe you'll change your mind when they begin to slit your pants and shave your head."

I swallowed and wet my lips.

McConaughy kept hammering at me. "And how about that gun on the dining room table? Your fingerprints are all over it."

"Don't I have a license to carry a gun?"

"Not that one. Besides, you wouldn't be wearing a weapon on your honeymoon unless you had some kind of caper in mind."

"All right," I said. "It's not my gun. It's Max's."

I hadn't meant to tell him and it was too late to bite my tongue.

A sharp glitter came into McConaughy's eyes. He bent forward intently. "Max who?"

Now I was in more trouble. I couldn't tell without dragging Victor Sweet into the thing. Which wouldn't exactly endear me to the gambler. And I was on Sweet's blacklist to start with. What's more, if the story came out, they might have me on a charge of breaking and entering. And on top of that, I didn't even know who Max was.

So I shook my head at McConaughy.

He loved that. "Criqui!" he exploded. "I've had enough. You're coming downtown and I'm going to book you on suspicion of first degree homicide. Get your coat."

First degree homicide. Murder, number one. That meant no bail. It meant a tight little cell without a chance to do anything for myself.

I sighed with resignation and said, "It's in the next room."

He let me get up. I went into the dining room where my suitcoat was draped over the back of a chair. McConaughy watched me from the threshold. I slipped into my coat, sidling unobtrusively toward the wall. Suddenly I shot my hand out, snapping the light switch and plunging the room into darkness. Whirling through the swinging door, I skidded across the kitchen and burst out the service door into the hall.

Behind me I heard two noises in rapid succession: an angry roar and a solid smack as the swinging door met him head on.

I hit the stairs like a truck without brakes. Three at a time. I damn near broke my neck. It was a long trip down and I had only a slim chance of pulling it off.

McConaughy wouldn't take the stairs himself. He'd ring for the elevator. And his assistant would take the other car, covering the front.

An elevator descends vertically. I couldn't possibly beat it on foot.

But there was the human element. The psychology of the situation. I was four floors down now, my feet clattering. I hung onto the banister as I pivoted wildly around the landing. The lieutenant would jam the buzzer and keep it working.

That's one thing elevator operators enjoy. They like an impatient finger on the buzzer. They like it so much they deliberately take their time, so they can enjoy it longer. There's nothing in the union regulations that says they have to hurry just because they have an impatient customer.

I was counting on that. I was praying for it too.

Even so, I didn't risk it. I kept right on going, down into the basement. A pale wedge of light illuminated an exit. I ripped across the concrete floor. The exit led up a ramp into an alley; the alley led onto a side street.

AIR hit me in the face. No sirens were blowing. No cops jumped out of ambush. Nobody shoved a riot gun down my throat.

I was clear.

For a short time anyway. Until McConaughy put a reader out on me. Then every dick and patrolman in the city would be on his toes.

I had the kind of face they could recognize.

A taxi drifted along. That was another break. It was time some breaks came my way. I jumped aboard and had him drive across town through the night.

Escaping like this might be a mistake. If it was, it wouldn't be the first one I ever made. Running is tantamount to an admission of guilt. But I didn't want to sit in a cell, waiting for some legal sharpshooter to pull rabbits out of a hat. I wanted to

solve this thing. I had to find the real killer.

That brought to mind the other men in Flora's life.

There was Sam Welles. The man shaped like a bear. The blackmailer. The guy who had precipitated her wedding, who had scared her into digging up a husband. I remembered something he'd said. *Send the money to my hotel. The Marvin. I'll expect it tonight.*

But she hadn't sent it. She had been too busy and too excited about me. He could have grown impatient. He could have returned to the apartment. And he could have had an argument with her. It was an argument that had awakened me. And an argument can lead to a fight.

Sam Welles was in the picture. Definitely.

There was Paul Vanamann too. Her business partner and her fiancé. As a suspect he didn't rate high. But there could have been some kind of partnership insurance, survivor take all. That's not uncommon in business deals. It was not an angle that appealed to me, but I wasn't going to turn my back on it.

Like McConaughy had remarked: As a motive for murder, money outdistances all others three to one.

"Where to, buddy?" demanded the taxi driver as he twisted his head to look back at me.

"Drive around the park," I said.

"Look, buddy," the cabby said grittingly. "It's two o'clock and I been on duty since yesterday morning."

"Around the park," I said. "I'm paying for it."

He breathed through his nose like a man with adenoids. But he turned and he drove.

I went back to my thinking.

My last customer was Victor Sweet. He was her partner in some kind of a bond swindle. He had backed her. Now he believed that she was doublecrossing him. He thought I was doublecrossing him too.

Victor Sweet could have come back looking for revenge. Or he could have sent one of his loogans to do the job. Sweet had high blood pressure. He got excited easily. He wouldn't be frightened by a girl. If she got him sore enough he might have wielded that skillet himself.

"Let me off at the Hotel Marvin," I told the driver.

He was glad to get rid of me.

I WALKED through a seedy lobby that held a writing desk, some dispirited palms, and a few pieces of mohair furniture lumpier than a sparring partner's ear. I sat down at the writing desk. I folded a single piece of blank paper and slid it into an envelope. I sealed the envelope and used a broken pen to write *Sam Welles* with powdery ink.

I took it over to the desk clerk. He had a face like a deflated football.

The clerk glanced at the name, turned lazily and shoved the envelope into Box 519. Then he put his nose back into a racing form.

Now I knew where to go.

An ancient elevator creaked up to the fifth floor and dumped me onto a frayed green carpet that had been cleaned during Cleveland's administration. I drifted down the hall and found 519. Some disc jockey was playing a pop tune and Sam Welles' radio was repeating it at the top of its lungs.

I raised my hand to knock, then decided to surprise him. The knob turned under my hand. The door opened when I put pressure against it. I wasn't afraid to go in. The cops didn't know about Welles. They wouldn't be staked out here yet.

Somebody had got there ahead of me. Not by long either.

Not nearly long enough for Sam Welles to grow cold, or even to stop bleeding.

The gun had been held right up against his forehead. It was discolored by black powder burns. Some of the gases had chased the bullet

into the wound and then ballooned out and torn a ragged hole through skin and bone. The guy who shot him was taking no chances. Even so, the bullet had done more damage going out that it had done coming in.

He would never be any deader.

He lay on the bed, spread-eagled, wearing nothing but his pajama bottoms. Hair curled thickly over his barrel chest like some cheap black sweater bought at a Dollar Day Sale.

His gold tooth shone between peeled-back lips. It was worth maybe fifteen bucks. The rest of him wouldn't bring a dime. He was an ugly lump of clay with blood in the corners of his eyes and more blood hanging off the tip of his broad flat nose.

I didn't feel too sorry for him. He had a nose that itched for trouble and he had got it. I hadn't liked him alive and I liked him no better dead. Nobody would miss him, a cheap two-bit scavenger. The world wouldn't stop revolving on its axis.

He had given Flora a bad time.

He was to give me a worse one the next instant when a sharp rap sounded against the door.

I stiffened like a broomstick and my heart stalled and then went wild against my ribs. It hurt. It felt like a battering ram. If they found me here, I was done. Finished. Two corpses in one night would polish it.

I ran over to the window and looked out. Five floors straight down to the street. No fire escape. No parachute either. My eyes raced around frantically and found an adjoining bathroom. I jumped over to it. No windows there at all. Only the standard plumbing and I was too big to flush myself down the drain.

The knock sounded again. Hard and purposefully. Somebody meant business.

My back was bathed in moisture. I went over and reached for the doorknob with a numb hand. I opened it and looked out. I had to look down to see him. He was a sawed-off little runt in a faded blue terrycloth robe. He was blazing mad. His hair was rumpled and his eyes were red.

"Turn off that radio," he howled, his jaw quivering with anger. "How's a man gonna get to sleep with all that racket, you damn big silly-lookin' baboon!"

"Yes, sir," I said meekly. "Right away."

He shot me a withering glare. He turned away, grumbling. Some of his words were choice. I caught a few of them, but I wasn't going to make an issue out of it. I went over and silenced the radio.

The next instant I could have cut my hand off at the wrist. The man who had killed Welles had probably turned the radio on in the first place to hide the sound of the shot.

Now my fingerprints obliterated his on the dial.

Chalk up another bonehead move for Steve Criqui.

I wiped it off with my handkerchief, realizing at the same time that it was too late. The little guy in the terrycloth robe would identify me. He'd produce himself when the body was found. McConaughy would recognize the description. How many guys are six feet tall, with straight black hair and a spoon-shaped scar on their chins?

I was in it now, up to here. The cops were after me from the front, and Victor Sweet would be after me from the rear.

A smart guy would grow a beard and haul freight for Zanzibar or Siam. The more I thought about it, the more the idea appealed to me. Then I remembered that I was Flora's husband. It had been a short marriage but she had trusted me and was even going to pay me. I was going to inherit her money.

If I found the killer I'd have squared her, and I'd be sitting in clover.

If I didn't, though, I'd be sitting in the fireless cooker.

I went away from Mr. Sam Welles

and walked down the stairs and sneaked out of the Marvin Hotel. I climbed into the BMT Subway and sat in a train. Cops were probably waiting at my apartment. More cops were probably waiting at my office.

A dime took me all the way to Coney Island. I made the trip twice and when I finally came through the kiosk onto Forty-second Street, it was nine-thirty a.m.

CHAPTER V

A BRIGHT sun painted golden shadows along Fifth Avenue. I stopped off at a drug store and bought some foundation makeup and a ten-cent mirror. I took them into a phone booth and did a pretty good job of covering the scar on my chin. Then I plugged a nickel into the slot and dialed a number.

Victor Sweet answered on the second ring.

"Steve Criqui," I told him.

He choked with indignation. "Criqui," he said in a harsh whisper, "you found those bonds and you killed that girl. You can't doublecross me. Nobody has ever gotten away with it. Where are those bonds?"

"I got 'em," I said.

Silence for a moment. Then he spoke more reasonably. "Where are you, my boy?"

"In a phone booth. Look, Sweet, you want the bonds?"

"Naturally. They're mine. I paid for them."

"Okay. Meet me at the office."

"What office?" His tone was guarded.

"The bankers'," I said, crossing my fingers.

"You mean Ledyard and Company?"

"Of course," I grinned. "I want a cut. Twenty per cent."

"Now listen—"

"Twenty per cent, Mr. Sweet. I need getaway money."

"It's a holdup," he spluttered.

"Take it or leave it. I'm going to count five and then I'll hang up."

"I'll take it," he said hastily. "I can meet you right away. At once."

"This afternoon at two. I have some business to attend to."

"At two," he agreed.

"And keep your muscle men out of sight or the deal is off, understand?"

He understood and we hung up.

The Wall Street building went up fifty stories and commanded a bird's eye view of New York harbor. Ledyard & Company occupied the whole twenty-fifth floor. A high speed elevator did annoying things to my stomach.

From the blond receptionist in the walnut-paneled room I got the welcoming smile usually reserved for customers. My suit was unpressed but for all she knew I might be some eccentric millionaire.

"Morning," I said crisply. "I'd like to see the man in charge of your foreign bond department."

"Your name, please?"

"Mr. Arnold Benedict." It was the first one that popped into my mind.

She flicked a switch on a small PBX and had a whispered conference with the mouthpiece. Then her eyes veered up to mine. "Can you state the nature of your business, Mr. Benedict?"

"To the proper party, yes. It's official."

Additional dialogue with the instrument got me the green light. She pointed and said, "Down that hall. Room Six. Mr. Wilberforce."

ROOM SIX was large and square. Mr. Wilberforce was large and round. A middle-aged man crowding a size forty-six Brooks Brothers suit, with the richly florid complexion of a man who doesn't count his whisky sours and who doesn't have to economize on them either.

He shoved a plump hand across his desk and said, without rising, "Good day, Mr. Arnold." Then he smiled. "No relation, I trust. to that other

of Revolutionary War fame, Mr. Benedict Arnold."

"The name," I announced stiffly, "is Arnold Benedict. Special Agent for the Department of Immigration."

It opened his eyes and made him sober. "Sit down, sir."

I got deposited in the leather chair and said, "Ledyard and Company can help us, Mr. Wilberforce. The Department is up against a serious problem. There seems to be a gang of smugglers around who are bringing aliens into this country. Slovaks, Croats, Serbians, Roumanians, Hungarians.

"We believe this movement is being financed by a rather strange method. According to our information, Ledyard and Company underwrote a certain prewar Hungarian bond issue. By finding the men who are presenting the bonds for payment, we may have the gang behind this scheme. Or at least shed some light on their *modus operandi*. We want you to look at your records and give us that information."

Telling him, not asking.

He had been leaning half across his desk, listening intently. His jaw set hard. He was a patriot ready to aid his government—anything so long as he didn't have to wear a uniform or shell out too much. He unbent an elbow at the handset and barked into the mouthpiece.

"We've got to watch these foreigners," he said firmly. "I'll tell you, Mr. Arnold—"

"Benedict," I corrected him.

". . . Mr. Benedict, we're overpopulated as it is. Our industry can absorb these people now, but after a while we may be due for a spot of trouble. I can't understand these foreigners. You never know what they're up to. They're unstable. They're not like us. Take me, for example. Why, an ancestor of mine was one of the first settlers in America."

One of the first settlers, I thought, sure—fifty cents on the dollar. That kind of thinking went against my grain. I could hear them murmuring about it at board room meetings and in the locker room. It even cost them an election.

I said, nodding piously, "How right you are, Mr. Wilberforce!"

I was tickled silly that he hadn't asked for credentials. Impersonating a Federal Officer was another offense you can add to my list since I'd entered this case.

His eyes were bright. "Are these criminals dangerous when captured?"

"Usually."

"Do you—do you ever have to kill any of them?"

"Incessantly." I was being grave and modest about it.

A girl came into the room with a slip of paper.

He didn't bother to look at it. "Give it to Mr. Arnold," he said.

I didn't correct him on the name again. I got up and shook his hand. I heard how proud he was to be able to serve his government. I learned that we could call on him at any time.

Only when I got downstairs to the building lobby did I examine the list.

It was the last name that caught my eye. That, and the date when he had done business with them. Yesterday.

HIS apartment was across the street from Carnegie Hall. It could be that he liked concerts. Or maybe it was the only place he could find. Well, he wouldn't be living there long, and the only music he'd hear would be harp concerts. I hoped.

No one answered the bell. I wasn't surprised. I figured he was down at police headquarters. They'd have a lot of questions for him to answer.

I used a trick. I twisted the knob with one hand. Then I cracked the door just below the lock. It sprung the latch enough so that a hard shove sent the door back on its hinges.

He had nice bachelor quarters. Two and a half rooms. I made myself comfortable. I sat on a leather chesterfield and smoked one of his long Havana fillers.

I didn't have long to wait.

He saw me and smelled the smoke at the same time. He came through the door and stopped short, gaping. Astonishment rounded his eyes. Flora's ghost couldn't have given him a greater start. His mouth got twisted like a scar.

"You!" he whispered.

"Me," I said. "Sit down, Mr. Vanamann. We have something to discuss."

It took some time before he got used to the idea. He shook his head to clear it. Wariness sharpened his features.

He said coldly, "I think we ought to have the police here," and reached for the telephone.

He was dialing the operator when I yanked the cord out of the wall.

He dropped the phone. "Look here, Criqui, haven't you done enough damage?"

"You don't know what damage is," I said. "Wait till you see your face in about fifteen minutes."

His hand flattened itself over his chest. "I don't understand. What do you want with me?"

As if he didn't know. I said evenly, "I want you to tell the truth. I want you to go to the cops and say that you killed Flora."

His jaw dangled. "Are you crazy?"

"Like a fox," I said. "I am also tired of being the goat in this bloody clambake. You killed Flora and you killed Sam Welles and you're going to take the rap for it, not me."

He reassembled his features and tried to adopt an attitude of cool detachment. His eyes betrayed him. They were giving me the sad-eyed pity usually reserved for idiots.

"I'll tell you why you killed her," I went on. "You killed her because a package containing a fortune in foreign bonds was delivered to the office. They were addressed to Flora but she never got them. They were intercepted by you, and appropriated by you. I know that to be a fact. I saw the records at Ledyard and Company. You collected on some of them not later than yesterday.

"Last night Flora got wind of it. She threatened to tell Victor Sweet. You knew what that would mean. So you grabbed an iron skillet and Flora became a corpse."

He twisted a sneer at me. "That's preposterous."

"Sure it is. But wait till you see how neatly the State's attorney can tie it up. I'll testify Flora never got the bonds. Sweet will testify *he* never got them. Ledyard and Company's records will testify that *you* had them. I'll bet the rest of them are in your safe deposit box right now."

"What about Sam Welles?" he wanted to know.

I TOLD him. "Welles was expecting a blackmail installment last night. When he didn't get it he returned to Flora's apartment. My guess is that he was standing right outside the door while you were having a fight with her. He knew what happened when you came tearing out looking like the wrath. But a little thing like murder wouldn't bother Welles. He wouldn't appreciate losing his source of income, though, unless another turned up to replace it.

"And he had a beaut," I went on. "You, Vanamann. He figured you'd shell out plenty to save your neck. So he followed you and put the squeeze on. You knew what the end of the story was going to be right then. You paid him something on account and spent a couple of hours chewing on your nails. You were in a terrible sweat. Then you made up your mind. You went to the hotel and got in and cooled him off. But look,

boy, you're no professional. You must have left your prints around, on the walls, in the hallway, on the banister, somewhere. They'll place you there."

His face was a gargoyle's face. He sighed and took a gun out of his pocket.

Another boner. I was dull tonight. He had shot Sam Welles and I should have known he'd be heeled.

I swallowed hard. "Better put a silencer on that thing. These old buildings aren't soundproof. A shot will bring the neighbors."

He smiled thinly. "So what? I'm only going to shoot a man wanted by the police for murder. This gun isn't registered. It's yours. You came here to kill me and I took it away from you. It's the same one you used to kill Welles."

He was getting wound up to it and his eyes were abnormally bright. I didn't want it to happen right then. Where there's life there's hope. He had to be stalled.

"You're not using your bean, Vanamann," I said. "Finding me here will start them wondering, and asking questions. They'd want to know why I came. You'd better do it somewhere else."

It gave him something to reflect on. I kept my fingers crossed while he pondered, brows screwed unevenly over his nose. The negative shake of his head told that my suggestion had been rejected. His hand swept down and scooped a pillow off the sofa. He started to wrap it around the gun, to use as a muffler. For an instant, for a very brief splinter of time, his attention was on something else.

I left the floor in a flying tackle at his knees.

I never reached him in time. It takes hardly any pull at all to squeeze a trigger. There was a blinding flash, then my eardrums roared, then my shoulder felt as if an elephant had kicked it. I went down on both knees, with my palms braced against the floor, like a tired but reverent Moslem facing Mecca.

He came and stood over me. His face was solemn as he lifted the gun over my head like a mallet, not willing to risk another shot. I tried to move. I was paralyzed. Then I saw something behind him. The door opened and a .38 Smith & Wesson came through. Behind the .38 stood Lieutenant McConaughy.

He worked it once, very quickly. McConaughy was a man who didn't waste his time on bowling teams. His free hours were spent on the target range. His weapon coughed violently and the gun flew out of Vanamann's hand.

Vanamann grabbed his bleeding wrist, pain contorted his face. He was one surprised duck.

McConaughy came over to me, looking concerned. "Lucky for you I followed Vanamann after he was questioned. I didn't like the way he told his story. He was too nervous, too jumpy."

"Then you heard?"

"Enough to square him down in the chair."

"You sure took your sweet time breaking in," I said bitterly. "He damn near stopped my clock for good."

McConaughy shrugged. "Had a little trouble fitting a passkey into the lock."

"Well, don't just stand there. Call an ambulance before I bleed to death."

"Yes, sir," he said with mock deference. "What hospital would you like? You're rich now, Mr. Criqui. The girl didn't leave any will."

I had forgotten. I began to giggle. I was thinking that now I could eat all the chocolate grasshoppers I wanted.

And I would, too.

Free Wheeling to Hades

By Norman A. Daniels



The old eccentric gave away so much money for free, somebody got the bright idea of taking his life the same way. And Don Crain, who chauffeured the old man on his giveaway program, was slated to receive the electric chair as the Patsy of the Year.

DON CRAIN piloted the six-thousand-dollar sedan along one of the busier streets. Beside him sat Alvah Spriggs, ninety-five pounds of domineering, vile-tempered humanity. His spindly legs didn't touch the floor of the car and in the back was set the folding wheel chair for his use. Alvah Spriggs had made a fortune, bossed everyone he ever met, and had been bested only by fate. Spriggs was a cripple without the ability even to stand.

Between Don Crain and Alvah Spriggs was a metal cash box containing some sixteen thousand dollars, one other reason why Crain was beginning to dislike his job as

Sprigg's chauffeur and male nurse.

"Stop!" Spriggs screamed. He leaned forward, his very large head turned toward the curb where a junkman was watering his horse.

Crain sighed, pulled to the curb and reached for the cash box.

Spriggs said, "Give him fifty dollars."

"Yes, sir," Crain said. He took a single fifty-dollar bill from the top of the pile of cash, got out of the car and walked over to the junkman. He handed him the fifty-dollar bill.

"Don't ask me why," Crain told the amazed man. "The old boy I work for likes horses and likes men who treat them well. So the fifty bucks is yours."

Crain got back into the car. Three blocks farther he stepped on the brake and nosed the long sedan over to block all traffic. He did this almost unconsciously. A woman wheeling a baby carriage had been trapped in the middle of the street when the lights changed. Crain waved recognition to her smiling thanks.

Alvah Spriggs said, "Take fifty dollars out of the box and put it in your pocket, Donald. That was a very nice thing to do."

Crain said, "Mr. Spriggs, you pay me a hundred dollars a week to take care of you. That's all I want. These tips of anywhere from twenty to fifty dollars you give me—well, frankly, I don't earn them."

"Take fifty," Spriggs snapped. "I'm a very rich man, Donald. I've got too much money and for sixty-five years of my life all I did was gather more and more. Now I've discovered what it's for."

"Little Mr. Sunshine," Crain murmured to himself and took fifty dollars.

IT WAS like this every time they went out. Astounded people were given varied sums of money and most of them hadn't the faintest idea why. Though Crain hadn't met anyone who refused to take the money. It was quite true that Spriggs had a fortune, but at the rate he'd been going the last sixty days, there wouldn't be much left in another six months.

"Do you know where that small animal hospital is, somewhere in the neighborhood?" Spriggs asked. "The one that charges only when people can afford to pay."

"Two blocks ahead, two east," Crain said. "How much shall I give them?"

"Ten thousand," Spriggs replied. "That's why I brought so much money with me today. Walk in, lay the cash on somebody's desk, say that an admirer of their work sent it and get out before they can ask any questions."

Crain obeyed the order. He thought the veterinary in charge was going to faint. He got out of there quickly, without even letting them get a good look at him.

He reported to Spriggs and the old man chuckled. Crain started the car and rolled north again. A dozen blocks farther on he stopped for a traffic light. Crain was suddenly fed up. Completely and permanently finished. He hated that old man, hated his bossing and domineering. Not even those fantastic tips or his weird form of charity made any difference. Crain was tired of acting the flunkey.

He said, "Mr. Spriggs, I'm quitting tonight."

"Quitting?" Spriggs roared. He was small-bodied, but there were enormous proportions to his voice. "You'll not quit. Nobody quits who works for me. I'll give you more money."

"Look," Crain said patiently. "I don't want more money. You pay me enough for what I do. I'm just sick of being a nursemaid. I'm fed up with living somebody else's life, running somebody else's errands."

"I like you," Spriggs said flatly. I'll call in my lawyer in the morning. That's the only will I'll make."

Spriggs acted as though the entire matter was now settled. Crain started the car. He said, "I'm sorry, Mr.

Spriggs, I'm not for sale. I've made up my mind for good. I'm quitting and all your money won't buy me."

Spriggs hoisted himself around. "You're an ungrateful pup," he shrieked. "You took my money up to now. Plenty of it. Maybe ten thousand isn't enough. . . ."

"Be quiet," Crain snapped. "Half the people on the street can hear you. Even the traffic cop is looking our way."

"Traffic cop!" Spriggs peered through the windshield. "Oh, yes—last week I saw him help an old lady across the street. Pull over and give him fifty."

"It's your dough," Crain told him, "but after today you'll have to find another boy to toss money around."

As Crain pulled up beside the patrolman, Spriggs was venting his rage in a shrill squeak. Crain shrugged, handed the cop the fifty dollars and pulled away. In the rear-view mirror he saw the cop take off his hat and scratch his head. Crain didn't blame him.

He paid no attention to the vituperation Spriggs rained on him. Crain pulled into a narrow road that led to a steep incline. At the top of this was a circular parking space and beyond that dizzy height was a cliff known as Lookout Point. Spriggs liked to come here when the weather was good.

Crain stopped the car, got out and removed the folding wheel chair. He set this up, lifted Spriggs out of the car and deposited him in the chair. He wheeled the man to the small park, across the flat rock to the unguarded edge. Part of the edge was protected by iron pipes, but Spriggs liked to be pushed as close to the edge as possible.

Crain enjoyed this park. When they came here, Spriggs sat in rapt oblivion to all else save the view. Crain didn't have to listen to him. He walked over to the iron pipe fence and leaned against it, idly watching two people who were seated on one of the green benches.

THEY were about fifty, the man somewhat grayer than the woman. They were well dressed and seemed to be enjoying the sunlight and air and they kept up a lively conversation. Crain began turning away when the man pulled back his coat sleeve and looked at his watch. He arose, peered down the incline toward the street below. Crain automatically looked too and saw a police car pulling in and near a call box.

The man nodded and the woman arose. They walked briskly toward Spriggs in the wheel chair. Neither said a word. They merely grasped the back of the chair, pushed it forward to the edge of the cliff and sent it scooting over. Spriggs screamed as he cleared the edge. The scream grew shriller and louder, rose to a nerve-jangling pitch and then was abruptly cut off.

Crain found himself yelling, too, and he started running toward the pair. They stood there quietly, waiting for him. The man suddenly leaped aside, got behind Crain and held his arms. The woman stepped closer and began clawing at his face while she raised her voice in shouts for help.

Crain tried to get himself free but the man had a good grip and knew how to keep Crain helpless. The woman kept yelling. Crain heard pounding feet as two patrolmen from the radio car rushed up.

The woman said, "It was awful. I never saw anything so terrible. He—he pushed that poor crippled old man off the cliff. Deliberately pushed him."

"Who?" the cop gasped.

She pointed at Crain. "My husband and I were sitting chatting. This man drove up, lifted a cripple out of the car and put him in a wheel chair. They were arguing. He pushed the wheel chair to the edge of the cliff and left it there. The cripple went to sleep, I think. Then, all of a sudden this—

this murderer ran over and gave the chair a shove."

"It rolled right off the cliff," the man said. "It was a ghastly thing to hear that cripple screaming."

One cop hurried to the edge of the cliff. The other took handcuffs from his belt. He closed one cuff around Crain's wrist.

Crain said, "Listen, officer, the very opposite happened. These two people pushed Mr. Spriggs off the cliff. Then they attacked me and started yelling. It was all timed so you'd be ringing in on the street below and hear them. They killed him, I tell you."

"I don't know what's what," the cop grumbled. "Not yet, but I'm holding you."

The patrolman who lay flat at the edge of the cliff, looking down, called out, "Joe—there's a man down there. All busted up. There are parts of a wheel chair around him."

The patrolman led Crain over toward the cliff, holding his arm tightly. Crain was numbed from the suddenness and the horror of the crime and he wondered if the accusations of those two murderers was a nightmare.

He shook his head as if to clear his brain. It had been no dream. They'd accused him and they were two against one. Their combined word was better than his. Crain suddenly realized he had to get away. Otherwise he'd face the electric chair. They'd find motive enough. Half a hundred people knew that he and Spriggs frequently quarrelled. There was all that cash to account for. Spriggs had drawn it from his bank only yesterday. Some of it might be traced but not all, and they'd say he stole it and killed the old man when he accused him of being a thief.

Crain knew he must escape now. At once! He wheeled around, hit the heel of his free hand against the patrolman's jaw and broke that restraining grasp. He pushed the patrolman away with both hands, thankful that the cop was himself a little dazed by the sudden, strange crime. In the same movement Crain turned sharply and started running. His car was only fifty yards away.

The man and woman began shouting, the two cops added their voices to the din and one of them flung a shot at him, but Crain kept going. The car was facing down the steep incline. He opened the door, slid behind the wheel and released the brake. It began rolling. He threw it into gear, engaged the clutch and stepped on the gas pedal.

He heard half a dozen shots. They sounded miles away. Something hit the rear window and cobwebbed it, something else smacked into the side of the car and Crain knew the shots might sound far off, but the bullets were very close.

Then he was on the street and roaring downtown. He took a cross street, kept going for half a dozen blocks until he reached a busy avenue where there was a corner bus stop. He parked the car, started to leave it and recollected the money box.

IT OCCURRED to him that he'd be accused of stealing the money anyway so he opened the box, appropriated what he estimated to be four thousand dollars and ran to the bus stop. A bus was pulling out and he swung aboard. Ten minutes later he got off and hailed a taxi. He used this to reach the center of town, he paid off the driver and set out afoot.

There'd be an alarm for him by now, but he banked on the fact that the cops hadn't paid much attention to him and wouldn't have too good a description. The pair of killers could furnish one and they would, but a description of Crain would fit a hundred men. He was of average build with nothing outstanding about him. He didn't feel safe, but he figured he was out of serious danger just now.

He turned into a medium-sized hotel on a side street, entered the cocktail lounge and selected a dark corner. He stayed there for three

hours trying to figure out what in the world this was all about.

He was an accused killer. Accused by the two people who had actually murdered Spriggs. Of course the police would believe them—until they ran down the fact that they had some connection with Spriggs that could be turned into a motive. Until then, Crain had to keep out of sight. Once they got him, with two witnesses against him, they'd hardly go any further with their investigation.

It was dark when Crain walked the streets again. The evening was cool. He stopped in a clothing store where he bought a topcoat and a hat. These would help to change the description of his clothing as the police knew it.

He bought a second-hand suitcase on a side street, bought a number of newspapers and magazines and then hailed a taxi. He had himself driven back to the hotel. On the way he filled the suitcase with enough papers and magazines to give it sufficient weight.

He checked in at the hotel and was given a room on the tenth floor. He registered under the first name that occurred to him, tipped the bellhop and then locked himself in.

The room was equipped with a radio and he turned it on. There was a ten minute wait until news flash time and he spent this pacing the floor. Then the news came on and Crain froze in the center of the floor while he listened.

The announcer said, "Police are still looking for Donald Crain, alleged to be the murderer of his employer, the wealthy Alvah Spriggs. Police are rapidly building up a case. It is known that Crain and Spriggs were quarrelling violently before they reached Lookout Point and the argument was resumed there, according to Mr. and Mrs. Mark Gibson who witnessed the murder. With rare courage they grappled with the murderer and held him until police arrived. Oddly, Crain claimed the Gibsons were the guilty people. Detective Lieutenant Johnson, of Homicide, checked the Gibsons and has learned they are newcomers in town and never knew or saw Alvah Spriggs before."

The announcer went on, describing the details of the crime, telling about the dead man's rise to power and wealth. Crain didn't listen to that part of it. He sat down slowly, awed by the fact that the pair of murderers had never been in contact with Spriggs.

Crain thought of the newspapers in his suitcase and got them out. The front pages were composed largely of the murder story. They'd managed to dig up his picture—in his medical corps sergeant's uniform. There were photos of Spriggs covering thirty years of his life. Mark Gibson and his wife Lottie had posed and Crain studied the faces of the two people he alone knew were murderers.

HE COULD hardly believe that those two benign-looking, intelligent, and well-dressed people could kill and throw the blame on him. The very simplicity of the plan insured its success. Undoubtedly the Gibsons had no police record, bore a good reputation wherever they'd come from, and lived quietly here, waiting for the right opportunity to kill Spriggs. If the police stopped the investigation, or couldn't learn of the remotest connection between the Gibsons and Alvah Spriggs, they'd send him to the chair. He possessed no illusions about escaping arrest indefinitely.

His position was desperate. Staying here, keeping to his room, would do no good. Eventually they'd question hotel employees and wonder about the young man who never came out of his room.

He read the Gibsons' story again, marveling at the smoothness of it. He noted their address from the newspaper and soon began getting ideas.

He had to start thinking of suspects and motives. If the Gibsons were paid assassins without any connection with Spriggs, then someone who wanted Spriggs dead must have hired them for the kill. Spriggs had

three heirs and Crain began to mull over what he knew about them.

He half discarded Ellen Maitland, who was Spriggs's niece. Ellen was thirty-four, a shy, retiring woman who was employed at the local library.

Walter Renshaw was rather different. As Spriggs's half brother, he would come into one-third of the large estate. Renshaw didn't work; he lived mostly by his wits and, some people said, his trained dice which he could ring in cleverly. Renshaw was fifty, a heavy spender when he was in the chips and a borrower when he wasn't. For Crain's money, Renshaw was a highly possible suspect.

John Spriggs was the last of his line now. He was Alvah's twenty-three-year-old grandson and a constant headache to the old man. John liked blonds, pinch bottles, head waiters and hot music. If he'd ever turned a lick of work, Crain didn't know it. If John didn't inherit his share, he'd have to go to work and that would be tantamount to suicide in his case. Three consecutive hours of labor, Crain estimated, would kill John Spriggs outright.

Crain smoked the last of his cigarettes and decided to start taking chances. There was a vague plan in his mind. He needed the breaks to make it work and he couldn't find them sitting behind a locked hotel door. Crain tipped the brim of his hat well down, patted the pocket containing the money and walked out to the elevators.

The car was well filled and Crain felt as if everybody in it was eyeing him suspiciously. He walked casually across the lobby, convinced that fifty pairs of eyes were centering on him and that in a moment the doors would open and a hoard of police would swarm in.

He bought cigarettes and the girl behind the counter smiled at him in a friendly way. He smiled back and felt a little better. Walking the streets was nerve-racking. There seemed to be a policeman every fifty yards. Crain had to force himself to move casually. He wanted to pick up his heels and run, but there was no place to go.

Taxi drivers, he knew, were good at spotting wanted men so he avoided cabs. Busses were too jammed and anyway, the apartment house where the Gibsons lived wasn't so far away.

Crain stayed on the busy, well-lighted streets. He figured he'd be less observed among groups and throngs. In something over half an hour he walked past the sprawling apartment building where the Gibsons lived. He made sure no detectives were hanging around, then retraced his steps to the lobby.

There were rows upon rows of mail boxes. He scanned them hurriedly and found the one lettered with the names of Lottie and Mark Gibson. They were in 7H. Crain pondered the idea of boldly going up to face them but gave it up as too dangerous. He rang the superintendent's bell.

Crain said he was looking for a small furnished apartment for a short time. He showed enough money and got it without trouble. It was the first apartment to be vacant in this building in years, the super claimed as he pocketed the bill Crain gave him.

IN THE apartment Crain sat down to do some heavy thinking. Gradually the little pieces fell into place. He needed time and luck. Mostly luck. All thought of giving himself up had been banished long ago. To do so would only insure the fact that the case would be closed and he'd pay for the murder someone else had committed.

He phoned the super and because of the size of the bribe he'd given him, received meticulous attention. There were three mail deliveries a day, two in the morning and one in the afternoon. Crain filed that information away and with it perfected what he hoped would be a successful plan.

He didn't sleep that night. The darkness and silence were too filled

with Spriggs's whining voice and his final scream of horror. Crain used up his cigarettes before two o'clock and he didn't dare go out after more now.

At eight in the morning he walked down several flights to the lobby. He stepped up to the mail box bearing Gibson's name, slid the card out and put it into the slot of the box assigned him. He put his name in the Gibson slot. He hoped the change would not be noticed because the boxes were fairly close together.

Then Crain retired to a remote corner of the lobby, found a morning newspaper on a chair and read more about the case. Every word of the several stories brought him closer to the electric chair. He wouldn't have a chance now. They'd discovered that Spriggs had withdrawn almost twenty thousand dollars the day before he was killed, and none of the money could be found. That was motive enough for any jury.

At eight-forty the first mail was delivered. When the postman had gone, Crain hurried to the box to which he had the key. There was an envelope in it—an ad sent to Mark Gibson. He folded this and managed to squeeze it into Gibson's box, changing the names again.

Twenty minutes later Mrs. Gibson, looking motherly in a housecoat and flat slippers, opened the box with an eagerness she couldn't hide. She yanked out the envelope and then her smile of anticipation faded.

At ten the second morning, mail came. This time the Gibsons got none at all but at ten-thirty Mrs. Gibson came down again. This time she was dressed for the street.

Crain risked a quick trip to a grocery store two blocks across town, bought food and returned to his room. At two-thirty he was in the lobby again. The mailman had a thick brown envelope for the Gibsons and it went into Crain's box, for he'd once more switched name cards. He changed the card back, opened the box and without waiting to examine the envelope, hurried to his apartment.

There he ripped the seal and the cold sweat on his face became greater as he dumped out a sheaf of five-hundred-dollar bills. There were twenty of them. Ten thousand dollars!

Crain could hardly contain himself until it became dark. He hurried out, taking crazy chances because it was a time for risks. He bought a large box of cereal, had it wrapped in heavy paper, addressed it to Mrs. Gibson and sent it to her via messenger.

Half an hour later he stepped into a phone booth, called the Gibson apartment and when the woman answered, he deliberately hung up so she'd be bound to hear the click. At eight-forty he called again and this time Mark Gibson growled an answer. Again Crain hung up.

At nine o'clock he gave a fifteen-year-old boy a five-dollar bill. "All you have to do," he said, "is knock on the door of Apartment 7H in that building down the street. When the door is opened, just say you made a mistake. Got that?"

"I get five bucks for just that?" the boy asked.

"There'll be five more if they grab you and make you tell who sent you. I won't tell you my name, but you can describe me well enough."

"Sure, mister. I'll be back pronto."

The boy was gone for twenty minutes and when he returned, his face was a trifle swollen from being slapped and there were tears in his eyes.

"What kind of a deal was that?" he asked. "They pushed me around. I told them what you looked like and they hit me some more. Then the woman went to the phone and asked the operator to get her the police."

Crain handed the boy a ten-dollar bill. "Scoot for home," he said. "Don't stick around and get into trouble."

Crain himself hurried in the other direction, for he saw a radio car with its blinker light flashing as it rolled up toward the apartment house.

CRAIN was safely inside the building before the police reached it. He remained in the apartment for half an hour. Then he walked down four flights to the seventh floor. From a fire stairway he could keep 7H under close observation.

Mrs. Gibson came out first. She seemed highly nervous and kept tapping her foot as she waited for the self-service elevator. Crain didn't go after her. Failing to do so was, perhaps, the greatest risk he'd taken so far.

One of the Gibsons, he felt sure, would contact the person who paid to have Spriggs murdered. Paid to the tune of ten thousand dollars as the first installment. By this time the Gibsons should be frightened; nervous because they hadn't received their money. There'd been crazy phone calls, crazy messengers and a boy who described the man they were trying to frame.

Every knock on the door, each phone call, should have made them jumpier. Mrs. Gibson showed it, but Craig had an idea that Mark Gibson would be the one to make the actual demands on the man who hired them and sent that money.

Crain crept up to the apartment door and waited. He heard the phone ring, heard Gibson jump nervously and all but run for the instrument. Crain pressed an ear against the door.

Gibson said, "You're sure now, Lottie? Not a soul followed you? Good—that means we scared him off when we called the radio cops. Did you phone him? Yes—that's the way I wanted it. Give me ten minutes, come back here and keep the door locked. Don't answer the phone and don't let anybody in."

He dropped the phone to its cradle and Craig scampered for the fire stairway. He ran down the steps as fast as he could, reached the lobby and saw Mark Gibson walk through it in a great hurry.

Outside, Gibson took precautions against being followed and then waved for a cab at the corner. Crain's nerves twinged. He had to follow the man and the only way was to hire a cab—but if he was recognized—Gibson might win the game after all.

Crain pulled his hat brim down. He stopped a taxi and got in without showing his features. He handed the driver a sizeable bill.

"Tag that Checker cab just turning the corner. If you don't lose it, there's twenty dollars more for you."

The cab driver twisted his head to gape at the passenger, but Crain had sunk back into a dark corner. The driver said, "Okay, bud," and swung into the cross street long before Gibson's taxi reached the next avenue.

Gibson was going uptown, rather far, to the quieter parts of the city. Suddenly his cab swung into the curb. Crain told his driver not to stop. Gibson got out and stood near a street light as if to make identification easy.

Crain had his driver wait around the corner, got out and watched Gibson. About ten minutes later a dark sedan, one of those Crain knew belonged in the Spriggs garage, pulled up to the curb. Gibson got in fast and the car rolled off.

Crain ran back to his cab and used more of Spriggs's money to buy cooperation. The driver of Crain's taxi kept looking in the rear-view mirror, especially when they passed under lights. Then they came opposite a large store with a lavishly lighted window. The interior of the cab was illuminated as it rolled past.

The driver's foot hit the brake. Crain leaned forward. "All right, so I am the guy you think I am. You wouldn't want to get hurt, would you, my friend? Just keep on going and you'll be all right. Don't try anything funny."

The driver said nothing, but he kept looking for a policeman. Crain was running a race against time now. Suddenly the cab swung toward the curb. Crain saw that they were going past a green-lighted police precinct entrance. The driver had the door on

his side open. Before Crain could stop him, he braked hard, threw Crain off balance and jumped out. The cab climbed the curb with one wheel and came to a stop.

Crain climbed into the front of it, slipped behind the wheel and stepped on the gas. Gibson and the car he'd entered were almost out of sight. Crain began weaving in and out of traffic. Soon there would be sirens behind him. Every second counted now.

The sedan wasn't traveling fast and Crain stayed right behind it. He could hear the distant wail of sirens. Then he saw a radio car pull out of a side street two blocks ahead and block the avenue. The two policemen leaped out, guns in their fists.

The sedan with Gibson in it braked, trying to turn the next corner. Crain slid the cab alongside it, preventing any hope of a turn. The sedan was almost up to the radio car now and it slowed. Crain stopped alongside it and got out.

"Look in that sedan," he cried to the police. "The murderer of Mr. Spriggs and the man who paid him are in there. Go on—look for yourself."

GIBSON got out, his face beet red. The two cops were closing in. Crain leaped at the killer, wrapped both arms around him and they fell to the ground. Crain felt a gun pushed into the small of his back. He arose slowly, hands raised. Gibson got up too, brushing off his clothes and scowling. Walter Renshaw, Spriggs's gambling half brother, got out too. He looked down at the ground where Gibson had fallen. The envelope containing the five-hundred-dollar bills lay there.

Renshaw's eyes blazed. "You rat!" he shrieked at Gibson. "You said you didn't get—"

"Shut up," Gibson screamed. "It's a plant. Can't you see—"

The radio cops had heard enough. Renshaw and Gibson were put in the same car with Crain and all of them driven to the Homicide Squad main office. There Lieutenant Johnson took over.

Crain said, "I didn't kill Spriggs. Gibson did—him and his wife. Renshaw paid them—ten thousand dollars. Gibson tried to bleed Renshaw for more. When I tackled him, the money Renshaw sent fell out of his pocket . . ."

"That's a lie!" Gibson shouted. "I don't know where that money came from."

Lieutenant Johnson fingered the sheaf of bills. "Five hundreds, eh? They can be traced. This many will be remembered. Not that I believe your story, Crain. But then I don't believe Renshaw or Gibson either."

Crain said, "Pick up Mrs. Gibson. She's home and scared to death. I'm betting she'll talk. Because Mark Gibson was doublecrossing her too. She doesn't know he got the money. Gibson was going to take Renshaw for ten grand more."

Half an hour later, Crain was let out of his cell and taken to Lieutenant Johnson's office. The Homicide detective grinned at him.

"That wasn't a bad hunch. Mrs. Gibson yelled her head off. She was scared, but that didn't make her talk. When we told her about the ten thousand dollars which Renshaw swears he sent, she blew up. Renshaw was going to buy into a big gambling syndicate with money his half brother would leave him. The Gibsons are fronts for this gambling outfit. They stay out of trouble, have no record, but Renshaw convinced them to kill Spriggs and blame it on you. The thing worked too."

Crain relaxed for the first time in hours. "I had to have Renshaw and Gibson discovered together. They weren't supposed to know one another. Gibson swore he knew no one connected with Spriggs. I built up a nice case of nerves for them, until they wanted to get away and needed

(Continued on page 55)

My Money Says Murder

By
W. Lee Herrington

When the alarm went off, ex-cop Lane Vincent, who expected the sound of wedding bells, found himself listening to those frantic gas-chamber blues.



IT WASN'T all hangover. My mouth was hot and raw and my tongue was dry, like I had munched on a sandwich made with a hot branding iron. But when I turned on the light, my head didn't chase the pattern of the wallpaper the way it usually does. The walls of Cabin No. 14, Hi-Way Tourist Camp, were painted, not papered.

Whatever had wakened me had given up, gone away, or stopped. It couldn't have been the hot-rod delinquents chasing each other down Highway 40. I always sleep through that back in town. Somewhere a dog barked hoarsely and the crickets began scraping outside the window again.

"Christine?" Christine ought to be awake, but I got no answer from the other side of the curtained room. "Christine!" I called her name again. The low-ceilinged room was cold and I rolled off the bed, reaching for my clothes. My hand went up to screw my head on tighter.

That was when I discovered the large, economy-sized lump behind my left ear. Also, that I was fully dressed. It took ten seconds to realize the thing on the cushions of the chair in the corner was an alarm clock.

Another alarm clock ticked loudly in my left ear. It set on the little table by the bed. Its hands were held up to two minutes before midnight, pretending it hadn't wakened me. The alarm had been set for 11:45, and the little jigger on top was pulled up. I've always wanted to do what I did then. It wasn't my clock, my home, or my rising time.

I stumbled over something on the floor, grabbed the clock and slapped the jigger down. Then I heaved it through the open, unscreened window. I was picking up the shoe I had stumbled over when the knock on the door sounded.

My eyes raced over to the flimsy cloth curtain, pulled halfway across the opening. Beyond the edge of the curtain I could see Christine's legs. She lay on her side, bare knees slightly bent, one shoe off, one shoe on.

THE door stood a little open. Maybe three inches. That fact brought my mind up sharply, worried and working in high again. A foot showed, wedged in the opening. I put my toe against my side, slid the chain into place, then let it come hard against the slide.

"Okay, buddy," the hard voice said. "Open up."

I relaxed a little. Before I had quit the cops I had made the same kinds of demands, in the same tone, a lot of times. If the guy on the outside hasn't any warrant, you can usually tell him to go to hell. But most people are afraid of cops and they open up.

I didn't. I barked, "Beat it, Buster. Whatever it is, we don't want any."

This cop on the other side wasn't one of your rube carnival jokers. He moved around so the streak of light hit his face. He had eyes like Billy the Kid's, and a voice like a radio assistant district attorney.

"Keep giving me lip, Shorty, and you'll get a bat in the mouth." Shorty, he says. He was no taller than I am. "Routine check. How many occupants in this cabin?"

"Two."

"Sex? Age? Marital status?"

"One male, one female. Both over twenty-one," I said. "By a quirk of fate and the little matter of a license, we are both married. To each other. You want to make something out of it?"

"That's up to you," the cop offered. "Let's see the pedigree." He sighed and took his shoe out of the crack.

"Keep your poncho on, Buster," I snapped, and started over to the dresser where I had seen Christine put her handbag. In the middle of the room, I stopped. From the new angle, I could see all of Christine.

She lay on her side, legs parallel. Her knees bent. Fully dressed. Her deep-set eyes weren't deep-set now. They bulged. My heart wedged solidly in my throat. Behind me the Vice Squad cops mumbled outside the door.

I went to the bed and looked down at her, just long enough to make sure the dark places on her throat were bruises. I stared stupidly at the shoe I was holding in my hand. A bunch of straps sewn together, and a heel. Blood on the heel! The shoe slipped out of my limp fingers.

I managed to shake the new marriage certificate out of her handbag, and to keep some of the shocked look off my face, by the time I got to the door. Another alarm clock went off—the one in the chair.

The cop took the parchment, ran a flash over it. The alarm kept banging.

The short hairs on the back of my neck crawled upward. The cop slanted his head, listening.

"You were getting set to pull out at midnight?" he asked.

I COULDN'T get words past my paralyzed tongue so I shook my head. The cop began to grin, wisely.

"Standard honeymoon gag," he said. "Newlyweds. Friends hide alarm clocks, set to go off every fifteen or twenty minutes. Very funny."

"Hold it a minute, Mac." I reached the chair, unable to keep my eyes off the bed . . . off the horrible bulging of Christine's eyes. The clock went silent as I slapped it and went back to the door. The cop shoved the folded paper to me.

"Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Vincent," he said. "Our apologies to Mrs. Vincent. We hope you will both be very happy."

"Happy?" My voice cracked a little. "She will never know another unhappy minute."

The door closed and I leaned against it, sweat running down my back but quickly chilling as the stray breeze came in the window. Out on the highway, the hot rods came back up the slope. The hoarse dog voiced his irritation again.

The crickets were silent. I leaned there, stupidly, against the door of a four-buck-a-night tourist cabin and shook like a scared kid. There wasn't anything else in the world. Just me and the dead girl. You've cut corners all your life, I told myself. Now the law of averages has caught up with you. When the trembling stopped, I went in and knelt by the bed for a closer look at my wife.

You were a hell of a fine husband, pal. Love, honor and protect. . . . You couldn't have planned a nicer jam if you'd had all day to plan it. A man and a woman in a tourist cabin. It's done a hundred times a day, or night.

Newly married. It happens that way, too. The woman choked to death and the dummy running around, saying he had been clunked behind the ear and knocked cold. You can't remember if you got up in the night and squeezed her lovely throat? It happens that way too.

And then the cops begin to dig. They hear about the party and the drinks and they come up without a motive. They call it a drunken fight and let it go at manslaughter. Then some smart cop digs a little more and they come across the little matter of $87,690. *And money makes it murder.*

Then they ask about the thousand bucks in my pocket. A thousand bucks for a few hours of easy, enjoyable work—as pleasant and as easy as riding a streamline train. Or as dangerous as stepping in front of it.

The human side of my brain lurched around, screaming the one word: *"Run."* The practical side taunted me: *"Run where?"*

The cops finished their work and rode up the driveway, the gravel crackling under the tires. My mind took the night apart and put it back together a dozen times. Each time it got stuck on what had happened earlier that evening—on the thousand bucks and a joint back in town called *Sammy's Barbecue and Grill.* This was how it had all begun . . .

IT WAS an off night at Sammy's. They were serving a full ounce in the drink, to hang onto what few customers were there.

Ray Stoner, the lawyer, had met me up front, after I had got his phone call, and now he was herding me to a corner booth. Ray and I had gone to grade school. The way I heard it, he was doing all right now as a lawyer. Handling civil stuff. Estates, and those tricky little divorces you hear about when it is all over.

Ray Stoner got up and went again to the front of the joint, after patting my shoulder. I had my back to the front so I didn't see the girl until Stoner edged her gently into the booth. He remained standing.

"Vincent," Stoner said softly. "I want you to meet the nicest little girl in the world. Christine Donner . . . Lane Vincent. He's the lad I was telling you about."

Ray Stoner went to the bar, our eyes tagging along behind him. Then we looked at each other. The girl and I. Christine Donner had blue eyes, the exact color of a gas flame burning brightly in a cold room. What I had seen of her figure wouldn't bring out the wolf pack in full mating cry. But there wasn't anything to repel a normal man. I'm normal.

"Ray Stoner has been telling me about you, Vincent," she broke the silence.

"Nothing good, I hope?" We both laughed.

"Ray says you are more or less honest, intelligent but not brilliant, that you left the police department because of a charge of insubordination. I like insubordinate people . . . at times."

"It wasn't important then," I said. "It isn't now. I just wasn't cut out to be a cop, I guess. If it hadn't been one thing it would have been another."

"You're a philosopher."

"Am I?" I shook my head. "No, I got the rug jerked out from under me for three, four years. I'm slowly getting used to things again. Just say I got tired of uniforms and let it go at that."

"Ray tells me you save very little of your money, give some of it away to bums and friends and the rainy day is about to catch up with you." She leaned closer to me.

"Ray must have told you a lot." I smiled at her. "I saved out enough for a round of drinks. You make it sound like I was looking for a job."

"Aren't you?" She turned the burners in her eyes a little higher and I watched the bright flame as she said to the waiter, "Brandy." I pushed my glass at him and he went away.

"I'm fairly healthy and I have to eat," I admitted. "So I'm in the market. Something over fifty-one percent honest, nothing that has to do with cops, crime or uniforms. Otherwise I'm your boy."

She clapped her hands together in miniature applause. "Nice," she said. "You're over twenty-one, unmarried, and a citizen?"

I nodded. Christine Donner said, "You'll do." She opened her handbag and handed me the letter. "Read it," she offered.

The letter was from Ray Stoner's law office. I felt her eyes watching me while I read it.

> Dear Chris:
>
> This will confirm my phone conversation with you this morning. Old Hubert Donner was, to say the least, eccentric. I see no way out of your dilemma. That is, if you really want the money. I can assure you his will would hold in a test suit, so that is out.
>
> The part that concerns you, reads as follows: . . . to niece, Christine Donner, the sum of eighty-seven thousand, six hundred ninety dollars, the said amount being the cash residue after all other bequests have been satisfied, the same to carry the proviso that the said Christine Donner shall have reached her twenty-fifth birthday and that she shall, on her said twenty-fifth birthday, be happily married to a citizen of the United States . . .

I stopped there and handed the letter back to her. "If you are worried about staying alive," I said, "I can recommend a dozen good private guards."

THE waiter brought our drinks and I put mine where it belonged. I choked on the drink at her next words.

"Mr. Vincent, will you marry me . . . please?"

I shot a look at Ray Stoner, at the bar, then at the girl, and stood up. "I'll take you home before the screwy squad brings the wagon for you," I said. "Or, maybe I should get sore if it's a gag. It sounded like you asked me to marry you."

"Strictly business," she said quickly. "As Ray would say—for and in the consideration of the sum of one thou-

sand dollars, the same to be paid on your acceptance of the contractual terms."

"Which are . . ." I began warily.

"Ray Stoner can get a waiver on the waiting period and the health tests. Or we can go across the state line. After a respectable time, Ray Stoner will handle my divorce. Or yours, if you are the sensitive type. We'll be quits."

"When would it have to happen?" I stalled. It still sounded like a gag, even after reading the will terms. Even if no one makes gags with a thousand dollars.

"Tonight." She brightened her eyes. "Now."

"What's the rush?"

"Did I leave that part out?" She sighed. "I will be twenty-five years old tomorrow. All I have to do to inherit Uncle Hubert's bequest is to stay alive, have a husband . . . on my birthday."

Little prickles of warning kept poking at me. A technicality is a technicality. I married her. We came back to Sammy's for a wedding supper, to keep the record straight, and to buy drinks for a lot of people. I saw a friend of my own here and there in the crowd. Mostly, though, they were Christine's relatives, Ray Stoner's friends or just people. Stoner saw to it that drink flowed on an assembly line basis.

I found myself squared off in a booth with a man and a woman. They turned out to be a man named Mac Reeves and his wife, a cuddly, frilly dame called Libby, about Christine's age.

Mac Reeves said, "Your name's Vincent, huh? You didn't know the old man? Boy, you missed something, if you asked me."

"He didn't," Libby Reeves said stiffly.

Reeves ignored his frilly wife. "Libby is sore because her little old cousin Christine is beating her out of a wad of dough. Almost ninety grand—nothing to be sneezed at. I always say, 'Somebody loses, somebody wins.' Chris is a nice girl. Hope you two will be happy."

"Maybe you ought to have married Chris," Libby growled.

"Maybe I should have," Mac said agreeably.

"I'm cutting you folks out of something?" I asked.

"You didn't see the will?" Libby Reeves squeezed her mouth into a hard, chiseled line.

"Aw, skip it, will you, Lib?" Mac Reeves stood up. "You haven't got the money but you've got old Mac . . . Hey, waiter . . ."

Mac Reeves got up a little straighter and lurched out of the booth and went into a huddle with the waiter. The waiter cocked an eye at me, shook his head, then took off his apron and the last I saw of him he had on his hat and coat and was heading out into the street.

Mac came back and we went over to the bar. Libby stayed in the booth. Mac said, "To hell with her. She wants money and all I've got is a lot of looks, a sharp wit and brains. Rum?"

We tried the rum. When it was all over, we piled into my car. Stoner, Mac Reeves and me. One of the cabbies drove my car. Through it all, my mind never deserted me or the thousand bucks in my kick. But by the time the cabs and my old Plymouth pulled in at the Hi-Way Tourist Camp, I was beginning to be sore at myself. I couldn't have told you why. My hand hesitated on the register, then it was done. Mr. and Mrs. Lane Vincent, City. A cabin door was swinging open and I was offering to carry Christine over the threshold. She waved me away with a laugh.

"Don't work too hard, trying to earn your fee, Vincent."

Someone said, "He's got job enough, carrying that load he picked up at Sammy's." There were a lot of laughs, then the cabs pulled out and we seemed to be alone.

My wife took the back half of the

room and pulled the curtain. I sat down on my bed, heard one of her shoes hit the floor, then the light on her side went out. In the dark, Christine Donner Vincent said, "Thanks a million, Vincent. I'll do as much for you sometime. Leave your Social Security number so I can remember you in my will."

After a while I heard soft footsteps. I didn't try to kid myself they were Christine's. I tried to turn quickly. I succeeded. The turn kept me right on going, into a whirlpool. My face hit the pillow. My stomach climbed its walls a few times, then fell back, discouraged. The room began joining me in my wild, insane whirling. Then it stopped suddenly and the light went out . . .

THERE was nothing afterward to fill in the spaces. Just the realization that I was awake and that it wasn't all hangover. I knelt, looking at the coarse, bluish bruises on Christine's throat. It had been a lovely throat.

No one offered to stop me as I locked the door behind me and drove the old sedan back toward town.

Ray Stoner opened his apartment door and surprise jumped around on his thin face. "Well," he said, "that was short and snappy. Christine give you the heave already?"

"You know the angle on that, Ray," I said sharply. "It's after midnight now and she's fulfilled her requirements for the will. Ask me in. I need a drink."

Libby Reeves came out of the kitchen and peeked at me past Ray Stoner's wide shoulder. "Look at who's back," she cooed. "Come on in and join the wake."

The word slammed at me. *Wake.* It didn't look like a wake. Libby Reeves had lost her surly look. Stoner built a drink apiece and we went into the living room.

Mac Reeves came in, tossed his hat in a chair and sat down. He waved a hand. "How's the old married man?" He grinned at me.

"Let's talk about that," I said. "Whose idea was it to fix up the old alarm clock gag?"

The three of them split a quick look. Libby Reeves chewed on her full lip and the grin went off Mac Reeves' face. Ray Stoner eyed me levelly.

"Come to think of it," Stoner said. "I guess it was my idea. I passed it on to Mac. What about it?"

Mac Reeves said, "I got a couple of battered old clocks from the waiter. The best he could do on short notice."

"Charge 'em off then," I said. "I heaved one of them out the window."

Mac Reeves said, "Come to think of it, it wasn't such a hot idea, under the circumstances."

"You and your gags," Libby Reeves pouted and buried her nose in her glass.

"You and your screwy relatives," Mac barked at her. "Get your things, we're going home."

Libby's eyes jumped to Stoner. Ray Stoner laughed. "Let them quarrel in here. We'll talk in the kitchen." In the kitchen Ray said, "Well, how did it go?"

"How did what go?"

"I . . . well . . . Chris gave you the family history, didn't she?"

"I took one half of the cabin, she took the other. I got restless and decided to have a talk with you and Mac when the alarm went off. What about the rest of her family?"

"I meant her uncle. Hubert Donner," Stoner said. "It was almost as if he was trying to set his family against each other. He was just crazy enough to make money but sane enough to hang onto it. He was too stingy to give either of the girls, Libby or Christine, any money while he was alive. He was too normal not to pass it on in his will. He died in Melbourne, Australia. His will made me the executor. I filed it immediately for probate, because of the time element."

"You mean because Christine is twenty-five years old today."

Ray Stoner looked at his watch. "Yes. That's right. The day begins at midnight, for all legal purposes. She married you before midnight."

"Suppose she hadn't? What if something had happened — gone wrong at the last minute?"

STONER laughed. "What are you worrying about?" He nudged me playfully. "If you hadn't been willing to grab a fee, I would have married her myself—for nothing."

"For nothing?"

Stoner sobered. "After all, I'm the executor. It wouldn't have looked too good if it had to be handled that way."

"It would have looked like eighty-seven thousand dollars," I reminded him. "How about Mac Reeves? Libby doesn't look too happy about the whole thing."

"I wouldn't worry about that."

"I'm not worrying. Libby is worrying. So is Mac. Who inherited after Christine?"

"If Christine didn't qualify," Stoner explained, "Libby would have got the dough. She was married, over twenty-five. If you ask me, Donner deliberately worded his will to stir up enmity in the rest of his family."

"He managed all right," I said.

Libby Reeves and her husband came into the kitchen. That made it crowded. Libby examined me with almost closed eyes. Mac seemed to be standing off, measuring me.

Libby said, "I heard that crack, Vincent. Let me tell you something. Little Libby ain't worried about a thing. Maybe we didn't lose so much."

The cold, chilling memory of dark bruises on creamy skin flooded over me. I shivered. "No," I said. "Maybe you didn't lose a thing."

I went into the other room and got my hat. They followed me around like autograph hunters, handing me my hat, opening the door for me. Ray Stoner said, "Come in and see me in a few days, Vincent. After the estate goes through probate, we'll see about the details of getting you loose from Chris."

Again the image came to me of a pair of long legs. Feet with one shoe off . . . one shoe on. Bright eyes sparkling like a flame. The sounds in and outside Cabin No. 14.

"That," I said, "might take some doing. Say it the other way around . . . getting Christine loose from me."

Libby Reeves stiffened her face. Ray Stoner's eyes darkened stormily. "Wait a minute, Vincent. You mean you are going to hold up Chris for more than the thousand she paid you?"

"For a pleasant evening's work?" I asked. "I think I'm going to be hard to handle, Ray."

Mac Reeves laughed, without humor. "You've always been the smart cookie, Ray. I've always told you that you'd bet into the wrong hand someday. I think this is it." Mac Reeves turned to me and his smoldering eyes were hot. "Put the bite on him, kid. You've got him where it hurts. He'd do the same to you. Any of us would."

IT GAVE me a queer, tingling feeling to stand there, knowing I had them now. That one of them had put the choking, bruising marks on Christine's soft throat. And I meant to make them come with me, all the way. The question stayed in the eyes, unspoken in tight throats.

The killer knew Christine was dead. That I knew she was dead. The only thing that held them in line was that I had to be the patsy. I had to be the lad the cops hung it onto. Libby Reeves put her eyes on me and tried picking my brain with her narrowed, greedy look. Ray Stoner stood undecided, a civil lawyer faced with a criminal case.

Mac Reeves, half smiled, a sardonic, heedless look on his face as he closed the door behind me. I heard Mac say to Stoner, "You and your smart ideas."

His wife's protest, shrill and loud. Then the soft sound of a hard wide hand meeting softer flesh. A thin yelp. Maybe it was Libby, getting her lumps. Or the quick break-through of the lightly held control I had seen in Mac Reeves' eyes when he came close to Ray Stoner.

I wanted them fighting against each other. The hornets were stinging each other. Then they would come for me. When they found me, it would have to be with Christine.

They couldn't leave me alive now. Not with what I knew. I slowed my lead enough to let the gray convertible fall in behind me. When I stepped up the pace out on Highway 40, the convertible kept coming.

"I'm coming home with a killer, Christine, baby," I muttered bitterly in the dark. "Keep a little light in the window, honey . . . I'm bringing you company for your trip to the morgue."

My old sedan slowed at the intersection, then I was pulling in at Hi-Way Tourist Camp, stopping by the gas pumps. I felt a high surge of satisfaction as the gray convertible pulled in alongside and stopped. Mac Reeves got out and came over.

He said, "I got to worrying about you, kid. You and I ought to stick pretty close together for a while."

"Took the words out of my mouth, Mac," I said grimly and the words choked a little as I remembered what was ahead, down in Cabin No. 14. Out of the tail of my eye I saw the paunchy cop get the signal . . . the attendant's jabbing finger, heard the words: "That's the man in the sedan."

The .38 came out of a hip holster, then it was nudging me through the open car window.

"All right, buddy. Drive right on down to fourteen. You ought to remember where it is. Hank," the cop said over his shoulder, "bring the other character along—they seem to be together."

Hank did. We went down the graveled drive. Into Cabin No. 14. A flash bulb glared in our eyes. A dick I remembered from somewhere said, "Hello, Vincent, why did you come back?" He shook his head. "Rough, when it's an ex-cop that goes wrong."

"Where did your lead come from?" I asked.

"Phone. Attendant says he got a call. Came down here, nobody answered. He unlocked and went in. You know what he found.

"Can we see her?"

"You've seen her," the cop growled.

"I've seen 'em before, too," I grated. "My pal here hasn't. I want him to see how a dead girl looks . . . strangled."

THEY shoved Mac ahead of me and handed it to him the hard way. Brutally, stark and harsh. They ripped the sheet back, looking at Mac. Mac Reeves paled. He almost gagged. All Christine's youth and beauty were gone now. Death had cooled her skin and changed the creamy color of her flesh. Some of the coldness reached out and fingered Mac Reeves. At last they slid the sheet back over my wife's body.

"Hits you pretty hard, does it, Mac?" I asked slowly. "You loved her quite a bit, didn't you, Mac?"

"I never told her so," Mac Reeves said bitterly. "There never are enough of her kind to go around."

The dick jerked his head at a cop. "Separate these guys. Leave Vincent in here." The cameramen and the lab boys went out. A dick piloted Mac Reeves outside. The room was cold. I eyed the open window.

The dick said, "Well, Vincent, you're on your way to the gas chamber."

He left me in charge of a young cop. He went outside and I could hear the shuffling of feet on the gravel while they questioned Mac. A half hour went by. That was part of the routine. Leave me alone with the body. Break me down. The dick came in and the young cop went away.

"Your friend Reeves spilled the story. We've got it all. The party. The wedding. The trip out here and your names on the register." The dick sorted out the well-known facts for me.

"Mac give you a motive?" I asked

"There's three motives," the cop said levelly, "behind any murder. Greed, grudges, and the way a guy feels about a woman. You must have felt pretty strong about the woman to choke her that way, on your wedding night."

"I was beginning to have a feeling of sorts," I said. "In a few minutes more she would have had a birthday and a pile of dough. It could have been mine."

The dick said, "I've seen some pretty cool ones, Vincent. I hate woman killers. In a minute I'm going to forget I'm a cop."

"Do that," I said. "It's a wonderful feeling."

He did. He also forgot his basic training, or time had made him a little careless. His right hand went to his .38. His left tried for my nose. Both connected. When his gun was halfway out, I went for him the only right way, instinctively.

My hand slid down over the topstrap of the .38, sliding a thumb in front of the hammer as it came back. I winced with sharp pain as the firing pin came down on my thumb. My right hand made him grunt.

His left pounded into my face and my hard head rapped the door panel. But he came ahead, his hand still on his gun. Then I twisted and it was mine. He grunted as I rammed it into his belly and backed him against the door. I turned him around, put the chain on and let the door open a crack.

"Call your boys," I wheezed. "Make it sound natural. There's a lot you don't know about this. Tell the boys to turn Mac Reeves loose. You've got to make it convincing, pal."

He made it convincing. A cop came to the door. The dick said, "Set the other character down. Yeah, Reeves. We don't want him any more." That was enough. I kicked the door shut and motioned the cop to a chair.

"I'm still a cop at heart, I guess. I haven't time to let you in on all of it, but Reeves has to be on the loose to make it work. Now listen . . ."

THE dick said, "You're already roped, Vincent. The girl is dead. You married her. You inherit her money. You can't stop now. You gone completely nuts?"

"Yeah," I grated. "I think I have. It was one of the coolest little deals you could think up. The kiss-off is that the killer didn't know the Vice Squad was out tonight. That's my alibi."

"Alibi." The dick was game. He added a razzberry to the single word.

"Yeah," I said. "They knocked on the door just a few minutes before midnight. They tumbled to the alarm clock gag. The second clock went off while they were checking me. The clock rang a long time. Now if Christine . . . my wife . . . had been alive, she would have automatically put out a hand and stopped the alarm. She didn't. That's going to be my story. She was dead before midnight. It also robs me of a motive because if she died before midnight, and she did, then I had no motive. I couldn't inherit because she hadn't inherited."

"We'll think of a motive," the dick said.

"I'm sure you will."

The sound I was waiting for came. Faint, cautious and hushed. Like a quail scurrying through the brush. "Don't horse it up, copper, by being a hero." I almost whispered it to the dick as I went through the window, gun and all. The window frame scraped my legs. Outside, it was dark and cold and sharp weeds stabbed at me.

A deep-throated gasp husked in my ear and a shot stabbed orange flame at me. The dick's gun bucked a couple of times in my hand.

A dark figure stumbled, came erect

and staggered drunkenly across the weed-grown lot. I could follow only by sound of his flight. Behind me, another figure lurched against me, knocking me aside, a blow landing on my head. I went to one knee. Rough hands pushed me aside. A shot stabbed back through the dark. I heard a grunt, then the quickening sound of footsteps, like a panther, quickening for the kill. Sounds of hard, rough breathing, then a thud. A body rolling in the weeds. A match, flaring in the darkness. My eyes winced.

Mac Reeves stood panting, facing me, the match cupped in his hand, lighting his face. "Hold your shots, kid," Mac Reeves panted. He swept the match downward in an arc. "You can have him, kid. He's your bird. Your shot got him in the body somewhere. I wanted him pretty bad, but like I always say . . . somebody loses . . ."

I rolled the body over. Ray Stoner was still alive. It shows how you can get your thinking loused up. I had been decoying Mac Reeves back to the cabin; to taunt him into searching for the alarm clock I had heaved out the window. In my book, the killer had to have it.

The dick and the cops weren't long in coming. They shoved guns in our faces and it took awhile to straighten the thing out. They checked Ray Stoner's car, parked on a dark strip behind the cabin, picked up Libby Reeves, while we waited for the ambulance and the hearse.

MAC REEVES sat on the running board of a car after he got over being sick. The dick looked at Mac, then at me. "You had a right to suspect Reeves," the dick said. "After all, his wife would have got the dough if Christine Donner hadn't qualified."

"She didn't qualify," I reminded him. "The killer planted the two alarms, to look like a gag. It was more than that. The first one . . . that I heaved out the window . . . was to show that I woke up and shut it off at 11:45. The weak part of it was that Ray Stoner was a civil lawyer, not a criminal lawyer.

"Being a trained ex-cop, I would be supposed to automatically report the death before I lammed.

"That set the time. The Vice cops, checking our cabin just a few minutes before midnight, almost made it impossible for me to get loose from a charge of murder. The second clock went off. The Vice cop thought something was wrong but he didn't know what. The natural thing for Christine to do, if she was alive, would be to turn off the alarm on the second clock. They had me in the middle, all the way."

"You figured one of the three knew something had gone haywire when you walked in on them at Stoner's?"

"I said I had tossed the clock away. Then, when Mac tailed me, I thought he wanted the clock. It would show that I was awake, and had found Christine's body, before midnight. That meant Libby Reeves would get the dough. I should have been able to spot the love-light burning in her eyes and Stoner's . . . and the hate in Mac's eyes."

"Stoner couldn't have married Christine then, as he suggested, because he was tied to Libby and they wanted it whole hog?"

I nodded. "Stoner forgot that the minute he established the girl as dying before she inherited, that he pulled all of the motive from around me," I said finally.

Mac Reeves had made the mistake of trying to handle it all alone. He had tipped off the Vice cops on a phony story that his wife was at the Hi-Way Cabin Camp. The cops obliged. Mac thought the cops would come immediately to our cabin. Instead, they checked the whole camp, as routine. Then he made a phone call, just after midnight to make sure

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Conclave With Corpses

By Carl Memling

The setting was carefully staged . . . darkened room, hushed whispers, mounting tenseness . . . for a sinister setup of crime was entangling a woman who was trying to speak with her dead husband.

THE detective smiled blandly, nodded; then his face writhed in a grimace of shock. "Please," he gasped, "say that again."

The fat lady frowned. Lines furrowed her massive powdered cheeks, and she shifted petulantly on the sighing sofa. "I was talking to my dead husband," she said.

"What!"

The fat lady shook her head. It was as though she were a hard-working teacher and he a sensationally backward pupil.

"You asked me where I was and what I was doing when the burglar came," she said slowly, "and I told you. I was talking to my dead husband."

The detective laced his fingers over his eyes. Ohmigosh, he thought. Harry Barlow, you're dealing with a nut. A routine jewelry job, the chief said. But why didn't he tell me the lady who got robbed was a nut?

He slid his fingers away from his eyes and smiled feebly. "You're excited," he said. "Very understandable. The shock. Maybe you'd like to rest awhile, and I'll come back later."

The fat lady snorted. Folds of fat rolled in a dance of indignation. "Mr. Barlow," she snorted, "I meant what I said."

"But Mrs. Parkington—"

"Don't tell me you've never heard of Manuelo," she said scornfully.

"Manuelo?"

"The medium," she explained. "I was at a seance at his home when the burglar came here."

The detective breathed sharply. Behind his narrowing eyes, his brain whizzed. Medium, he thought, jewel robbery—it's happened again. This was at least the fourth time that shining rocks had got themselves lifted from an apartment while the owner was away at a seance. He'd checked for a tie-up before, but no dice. . . . This Manuelo was a new medium. Barlow ruminated briefly over the possibilities there.

He rose slowly, still thinking. He was a short, painfully thin man, his face was all bones. The bones formed a smile now and he rubbed his small gnarled hands together.

"Thank you," he said to the fat lady. "Thank you very much."

THERE was so much silence in the room, even the furniture seemed to be waiting. Two men and one woman sat there, encased in shadows and silence.

One man was a prominent actor, red-faced now without his make-up, and bleary eyed. He had come to speak to his daughter who had been killed in a plane crash over a year ago.



The woman was fat Mrs. Parkington. Almost six months had passed since the jewels had been stolen from her apartment, and now she had a new spiritualist. She wanted to talk to her husband again, she wanted to tell him how much she missed him, how lonely she was—and should she buy a certain bond issue that her broker had recommended?

The second man was young and tall and muscular. This was his third visit. Up till now he had merely listened. Later perhaps, when the medium felt that his sympathies were properly attuned, he would be asked whom he wanted to speak to.

They sat waiting. Each had been instructed by the medium's assistant not to exchange a single word. Outside, the night was black and starless; inside, a single candle flickered dimly. Everything in the room was swathed in shadows, the round, dark-wood table, the somber portraits on the wall, and the two men and one woman.

Silence kept mounting like sand in an hourglass. Sweat glistened on the actor's forehead. He swayed forward in his chair, then jerked himself back. Mrs. Parkington sighed. The young man gnawed his lips and glanced at the radium dial of his watch. Minutes crept by, the silence kept mounting.

Then a thin dapper man entered the room and strode to the table. Before seating himself, he quickly turned his head, greeting his three clients with curt nods.

"Pull your chairs to the table," he said.

Chair legs scraped and shoes anxiously slithered. A moment later Mrs. Parkington was leaning her elbows tremblingly on the table, the actor was wiping his forehead with a damp handkerchief, and the young man was stealing one last glimpse at his watch.

The medium stretched á small gnarled hand to Mrs. Parkington. "Give me you hand," he said.

Tentatively, inch by inch, she pushed her fingers forward. The medium's fingers coiled tightly around hers and she gasped at their coldness.

"Think," he said softly, "think of your husband."

She screwed her eyes tight, and thought. Her small mouth pursed in tight concentration. The medium weaved slowly in his chair. Slowly he disengaged his hand from hers. The single candle flickered. The medium pressed his hand to his eyes and the fingers waved slightly, like a loose mask in the wind. His mouth began to twitch. Suddenly his lips were gleaming wet. Mrs. Parkington leaned forward; her eyes flicked open, then bulged.

Slowly, like thin scratchings on a phonograph record, whispers began to fill the room. No words, just whispers, as though a thousand people were standing a hundred yards away, whispering a jumbled medley of imploring sound. A sob escaped the actor. Then the whispering died away.

"Marion!"

It was a man's voice, dim and sepulchral, droning past the medium's barely moving lips.

"Marion!"

Mrs. Parkington smiled tremulously. "Yes, John?" she breathed.

"How are you, Marion?"

"I'm very lonely, John. There's nothing to do."

"Are you happy, Marion?"

"I miss you, John."

"You will see me soon, Marion."

Mrs. Parkington's teeth were chattering now. "What do you mean, John?!"

The medium seemed to be asleep, his head folded back over the top of the chair.

"John, what do you mean? Will I *die?"*

Slowly the medium shuddered and pulled himself forward and opened his eyes. "He is gone," he said to Mrs. Parkington. "He will not speak any more tonight."

Mrs. Parkington sobbed. "But what did he mean? Will I die—is that how

I'll see him soon? And I wanted to ask him about some bonds!"

The medium shrugged. "You must ask him the *next* time," he said.

AT THAT moment the door of the room slid open and the medium's assistant entered, leaned over the table, and whispered to his master. The medium nodded and his assistant left. As he closed the door behind him, the lone candle flickered and almost snuffed out.

Then the medium turned to the young man, his mouth curving in a smile that seemed tinged with malice. His eyes met the young man's and they remained locked in a long hard stare. Bones moved slowly in the medium's knobby jaw. The young man flushed and half smiled.

"Give me your hand," the medium said softly.

The young man hesitated, then reached forward. He and the medium were leaning toward each other across the table now.

"I see a room," the medium said. "I see an open window and fluttering curtains. I see a man rifling a wall safe—"

The young man gasped and tried to pull his hand away. "I see jewels," the medium continued. "Sparkling jewels. I see the man climbing out through the window. Down the fire escape. I see police waiting for him below. An ambush! I see—"

"Let go!" the young man screamed, and flung himself back from the table. There was a click, and suddenly a flood lamp, like a blinding flash of lightning, washed the room with white. Mrs. Parkington yelped once, then folded slowly down to the floor in a dead faint.

The medium sat in his chair, his lips quirking up in a faint smile.

"You're a fake," the young man cried hoarsely. "All you mediums are fakes!"

The medium spoke calmly. "Sure, I'm a fake. I can't speak to ghosts. I'm a detective. My name is Harry Barlow. But you're a fake too. You didn't come here to speak to anyone dead. You're just a finger-man. You attend these seances, get the dope on one of the people there, and when you give the word, the gang goes through the apartment while you're holding the victim's hand at a round table.

"Only this time you were sucked in. We set up ambushes at every house and when we nabbed your friends tonight, they put the finger on you. You can't get out of here past our men."

The young man's face creased with sullen anger. His body tensed and his eyes darted from side to side. He saw the old actor cringing against the wall, his long well manicured fingers clutching frantically at his throat. He saw Harry Barlow smiling broadly, he saw him reaching slowly toward his pocket. Then Mrs. Parkington moaned and the young man glanced at her on the floor. His eyes fixed on her bulk and suddenly he was brandishing a knife.

HARRY BARLOW had just pulled a pair of handcuffs from his pocket when the young man lunged down toward Mrs. Parkington and kneeled over her mountainous form with the knife.

"Unless I get out of here," he snarled, "I'll really send this fat slob to her husband."

Harry Barlow stared at him. His hand with the handcuffs was arrested in mid-air, midway between his pocket and the table. The knife gleamed like bright neon. Slowly, inch by inch, it began traveling down toward the fat woman's pink throat.

"Don't be a fool," Harry Barlow said. "There's a big difference between a murder and a robbery rap."

The young man laughed raspingly. "No law lectures," he said. "Just get me out of here." The knife dropped another inch.

Harry Barlow sighed. He shrugged and dropped the handcuffs on the ta-

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Encore in Black

By Frank Taubes

When his boss Marlo was murdered, piano-playing Johnny found himself in a unique spot for a fledgling songwriter. For now he had to compose a bullet dirge—for himself.

JOHNNY was playing his piano solo. He could feel the hundreds of little strings that tied him to each person in the night club and he knew that the audience was in the palm of his hand.

It was a good feeling. He'd played ten years in bars and dives and small-town one-nighters before he'd known what it was like. Now that he'd written a hit, he bathed in the good feeling.

And he was glad he was finishing his engagement here at the Blue Swan. He'd never liked this club. There was something cold and sinister about it, a place that seemed to exude an eerie friendlessness. He always had the feeling here that something was about to happen. He would have left long ago had it not been for Angela.

He was about finished with the last encore. In a minute he'd bow and then rush off the little platform and down the corridor to his dressing room. She'd be waiting for him there.

He'd ask her again just as he'd asked her a hundred times. He wondered how she'd say no this time. He'd heard it so often and in so many different ways. This was his last night at the club. Soon he and Angela would see less and less of each other. He didn't want that to happen. He wanted to see her always.

The encore was ended. He listened to the whistling and applauding and gave them the big toothy grin. And then he was off-stage and down the hall, and that was when he saw her.

"Hya, Johnny," she said. "How'd it go?"

"Fine, Angela."

"I'm very glad for you," she said.

He stepped close to her and the perfume of her hair brushed past his nostrils.

"We'll miss you," she said.

"I'll miss *you* more."

"It's sweet of you to say that," she murmured. "I doubt it though. You've written a hit song. In a year you'll be living in a different world. That's the way life goes."

He looked at her a long time before he said, "You know how I feel about you, Angela." He knew it sounded awkward. He always made a mess of it. "I love you," he said.

"Do you, Johnny?"

HE COULDN'T answer for a moment. He wanted to look at her as long as he could. They say to be a hit vocalist you need ninety per cent looks and ten per cent talent. Angela was more beautiful than that. Men would always be gaping at her and reaching for her as some reach for a rainbow. But her voice would never be good enough for wax or for the air, and in ten years whisky would make it hoarse. He didn't want to think about it.

"I guess it's not much good," he said.

"We'll see each other, Johnny," she said. "I'll think of you."

"I'll write a lot of songs for you."

She smiled. "Wonderful, Johnny. I'll be singing them."

He knew then beyond any doubt it was hopeless. Tonight they'd have a couple of drinks together and then



it would be all over. There was nothing he could do.

"I've just finished the last show and have to see the boss," he said. "Meet me afterwards at Nick's."

"I'm going to leave right now," she said. She turned to the mirror and tilted her head to see the highlights of her hair. "See you in a few minutes, Johnny."

Marlo was chewing on his perpetual cigar when Johnny stepped into his office.

"I want to say good-by to you and Mr. Dutton," Johnny said.

"My partner's not around right now." A huge grin broke out on Marlo's face. "You look sick, kid. What's the matter—Angela turn you down again?" Then he roared with laughter, slapping the desk blotter with his fist.

"It's not funny," Johnny said.

"Well, don't worry about it," Marlo said. "The air's full of chicks like Angela. They'll come flying around with the dough you'll be making."

"Maybe."

"You'll be making more in royalties in a day than we could pay you in a month."

Johnny's mind wasn't that far ahead. He was thinking of now. He'd get his last pay, empty out his dressing room, and leave. It was almost over.

"When you get up there with Berlin and Rose and the Duke, give me a ring," Marlo was saying.

He grinned and shifted his cigar to the other side of his mouth. He opened his mouth and suddenly his whole expression changed. He stared at the door in back of Johnny. He said, "Hey, no, no," and the cigar dropped out of his mouth onto the desk.

Johnny saw Marlo's face for only a second. The next instant there was a sharp report and a shrill whistling past Johnny's ear. Johnny saw a dot in the center of Marlo's forehead. The dot was turning red and spreading over Marlo's face. And then Johnny tried to turn in his chair. He remembered hearing a shot and thinking he'd moved in the wrong direction. He remembered the room getting up and walking away from him. First Marlo faded out and then the desk faded out and then the floor turned into the ceiling and Johnny stretched his hands to cushion the fall he never felt.

The room was spinning wildly and there was something in his hand. He opened his eyes but the light clawed at them. He clamped them shut and tried to concentrate on the rest of his senses. Somewhere, far away, he heard voices.

He tried to think. Was he awake and really hearing, or was he still unconscious?

He sniffed the air and tasted the acrid smell of burnt powder. He flexed his fingers. One hand felt the soft deep-napped carpet and the other was on the cold metal of the gun. He opened his eyes carefully. The room tilted crazily as he propped his body against the corner of Marlo's desk. He pulled himself up and struggled to his feet.

He tried to remember something but the melody of his own song kept sprinting through his head. The notes of his song and the ridicule of Marlo's words made a confused jumble in his brain. His ears kept hearing things and his brain remembered other things, but everything was mixed up and all he knew for sure was that his head was reeling and ready to take off from his shoulders.

He was so dizzy. He tried to concentrate on the date. What a silly thing! Days were only the touch of Angela's lips and the racing weeks were like his love for her.

Johnny swallowed hard. His eyes were drawn in focus for a moment and he stared ahead.

Marlo was sitting in his chair, slumped forward on his desk, his big cigar eating a brown ridge into the handpolished veneer. Across the room a picture had been ripped off the wall and the safe behind it stood open.

SUDDENLY Johnny was conscious of his hand again. He was gripping the gun tightly. His eyes raced ahead searching for a place to hide it. And then his mind began skipping again. Gun . . . pain and spinning. . . . He saw the keys of his piano dancing before his eyes and he wanted to sleep. Without thinking he put his hand into his pocket—the hand holding the gun. The voices out in the hall were coming closer.

He'd have to get out. The open safe . . . the gun . . . Marlo. . . . It was too pat. The voices in the hall were very near now.

He moved forward and stumbled toward the door leading to Dutton's office. He opened it and quickly closed it behind him. He leaned against the door, out of breath.

With his head pressed hard against the door he could hear them talking.

"All right, where's the body?"

"That's the way I found him when I came in."

Johnny recognized the second voice as belonging to Benny Dutton, the kid nephew of Marlo's partner.

"Okay, now where's the guy who shot him?" the policeman asked.

"How the hell do I know?" the kid said.

"You found him out cold on the floor. Don't tell me you left the guy alone."

"That's what I'm telling you," Benny Dutton said.

"A wise guy," the patrolman said. "You know that you can get into trouble for letting the guy get away."

"Officer, the guy was out cold, I went to call you. So don't try to frighten me." Benny laughed.

The cop cursed under his breath and began dialing the phone.

Johnny could picture Benny Dutton impudently standing in the other room. The cafe owner's young nephew was an arrogant, wiry upstart whom the older man pampered and loved. Dutton had spoiled him. And now Benny believed that the world was his oyster and everything worthwhile in it his pearl.

Johnny had always disliked the kid. And secretly he feared him. The boy was reckless and capable of doing anything foolish.

Johnny needed time to pull himself together. The throbbing in his head had turned to a roar, like the base keys of a concert grand being struck over and over. He ran his hand over his forehead and his palm came away sticky with blood. He mopped his brow with his handkerchief. He'd been hit, the bullet creasing his temple. He could feel the wound stinging as he dabbed it.

And he could begin to see fragments of the picture. ". . . . A murder at the Blue Swan," he would hear the patrolman saying over the phone. "One of the partners of the place, shot through the head. They found some guy lying on the floor. Some pianist. . . . No, he got away. Sure, looks like an inside job. Two guys come in to rob the safe. One of them sees a chance to take the whole haul and cracks the other over the head . . ."

That was the way they would figure it, Johnny thought. This was the day when the payroll and a week end's receipts had been locked in the club's safe. He'd been alone with Marlo; the other partner was not around. There was the gun with his fingerprints on it. If the police found him this way, he wouldn't have a chance.

HE CROSSED Dutton's office in the dark, careful not to make any noise. At the far end of the room was a window that led into an alley. He raised the window silently and climbed out.

He needed time to think now, needed time to let his mind clear, to understand the nightmare of the last minutes.

All his life he'd been rubbing shoulders with tough guys and fast guys and the smart-money boys. But all he really knew was music. He needed help. Otherwise his career would be over just when he was about to go places. From Tin Pan Alley to the Death House Row.

He walked up Seventh Avenue, not knowing what to do. People were staring at him. Self-consciously he smoothed back his hair and suddenly realized that his cheek was caked with blood. He put his hand over his face, desperately looking for a place to get out of the crowd. He crossed the sidewalk and opened the door of a cab.

"Where to, Bud?"

Johnny didn't answer. He was out of breath and the perspiration had matted his shirt to his body.

"Where to, Bud?" The driver said, starting up the motor.

"Uptown." Johnny didn't really

know. Anywhere. Just to think. Just for a minute of rest.

The cool air coming through the window made him shiver. He sank back in the seat as far as the unyielding leather would permit. He took out a pack of cigarettes and lit one with trembling hands. A deep drag pulled the smoke into his lungs. He closed his eyes and relaxed.

The wind was clearing his head.

"How far uptown?" the cabby asked.

"Just drive," Johnny said.

"I don't know what it is about psychology, some guys like to drive fast and some guys like to drive slow," the driver said.

Johnny didn't answer.

"Okay," the driver said.

Johnny felt the hard shape of the thirty-two in his pocket. He realized that he should have disposed of the gun. He had been too groggy to think clearly. If only that bullet hadn't grazed his head. But whoever had fired it had probably meant to kill him.

For a moment he thought of telling the cabby to stop so that he could get out and throw the gun into a trash receptable. Now he hesitated. He'd need that gun. The men he was going to see didn't play the piano the way he did. A gun would sing the tune they'd listen to. He decided to take a chance and keep it.

He tried to add up what had happened. The safe had been opened without the use of force. That meant that the murderer must have known the safe combination. Marlo had died before his eyes, Johnny thought, leaving him framed for the murder. That left Dutton and Dutton's kid nephew as suspects. Or were there others who also knew the combination of that safe?

He'd start with Dutton. But what chance would he have with a man like that? Dutton was a nice, easy-going businessman on the surface. And below the surface he was a tough old-time café owner who had survived the post-prohibition cleanup. If Dutton had planned the whole thing, Johnny was no match for him. But there was nothing else he could do. He'd have to get to Dutton and do it before the police.

And suddenly he thought of Angela. She had left the café when he had gone into Marlo's office. He'd told her he would meet her in a few minutes and now over an hour had gone by. She'd probably gone home.

He was glad he thought of her. Angela would dress his wounds and her nearness would make him feel stronger. Perhaps his need for her would even bring them closer together. He wanted to be with her very much and the thought of it made him restless with excitement. He leaned forward and gave the driver an address off Central Park West.

"Finally decided where to go, eh?" said the driver.

"Yes."

"I don't know what it is about philosophy," the cabby said. "But some people know where they want to go and some people don't."

JOHNNY was in no mood to indulge in yak-yak. He'd have to make plans. First Angela would have to take care of his face where the bullet grazed him. Then he'd try to find Dutton and make him talk. And if that didn't work he'd have to search for Dutton's kid nephew. And then . . . That was the end. After that he'd have to trade in his music for a mausoleum.

He stood before Angela's door, put his finger on the bell and rang. He waited. She opened the door. She was wearing no makeup and her pale skin and lips made her look like a very young girl. A lock of red hair had become detached and was curling over her cheek.

She seemed startled to see him. "Your face, Johnny! Good Lord, what happened to you?"

He asked her to let him in. She hesitated a moment and then stepped

back. He couldn't keep his eyes off her face. She sat him down on the couch and dressed his wound.

"It's not too bad," she said. "But it might need stitches."

"Don't worry about it."

"I hope it doesn't leave a scar."

She was sitting at the foot of the couch and he could feel her close to him, as if her body was touching his.

He looked at her and then let his eyes nervously sweep the room. Bookcase . . . cocktail table . . . radio phonograph . . . scatter rugs . . . He'd seen the place often before. Some of her clothing was draped over the desk and chair at the far end of the room. She must have been tidying up when he came in.

He took hold of her hand and looked at her again. He told her what had happened, about Marlo and the two shots, about an open safe and a room that had been filled with death and dizzy blackness.

They looked at each other when he had finished.

"What'll you do now, Johnny?" she finally asked.

"I'll get Dutton or his crazy kid nephew or whoever else put me in this spot."

"The police will find you first," Angela said. "You'll only incriminate yourself by running."

"And if I give myself up?"

"You might have a chance."

"They'll burn me," he said.

She didn't answer. She toyed with the spool of adhesive in her hand, clicking it open and shut. "Dutton is tough," she finally said.

"And I'm sore."

"And how about Benny Dutton?"

"I guess I'll have to talk to him too."

Angela smiled. "Benny might not be in a listening mood," she said. "He's quite a boy, that Benny. When he was a brat he rode on his uncle's truck, smuggling whisky over the Canadian border. They say that once on a dare he bound and gagged a policeman, set his feet in cement, and then deposited the whole mess on the stationhouse steps."

"Will you help me?" Johnny asked.

Angela hesitated before answering. "What do you want me to do?"

"Help me find them."

"You're asking a lot," she said.

"Too much?"

"You got a dirty deal, Johnny. I know what that's like."

"With you beside me I've got a chance."

She looked at him and smiled. Then the smile was gone. "Why do you think it might be Dutton?" she asked.

"Suppose the Blue Swan wasn't doing so well," Johnny said. "Suppose it was going broke. What would the two partners have to do?"

"Bankruptcy, I guess," Angela said.

"And suppose one of the partners who was an old-timer at that sort of thing, wanted to make one last killing. Wouldn't robbing his own safe be an easy way?"

"Perhaps."

"It's better than perhaps," Johnny said. "Do you want to start now?"

"To Dutton's home?"

"That's right," Johnny said.

"And then . . ."

Johnny pulled out the little Colt Pocket Model and held it in front of him. "Then we'll see," he said.

FRANK DUTTON lived in a swank penthouse apartment on Sutton Place. The doorman touched his cap politely and said, "Yes, sir. Mr. Dutton has just gone upstairs." He went to the house phone and picked up the receiver. "I'll announce you."

"Never mind," Johnny said. "He's expecting us."

They stepped into the streamlined elevator. The doors slid shut and the car started to ascend. Johnny could hear the click as the elevator passed each floor and the whistling of the air in the shaft. He counted eighteen floors and then the elevator slid to a halt.

The elevator door led directly into

Dutton's apartment and they waited in the elevator for the door to open.

Johnny had his hand in his pocket, touching the automatic. He could feel the perspiration of his palm against the cool, smooth metal.

Perhaps Dutton wasn't alone. Johnny had seen the people who worked for him, old-time mobsters and young toughs, eager to make a reputation. He almost wished that the door would never open. He reached his thumb towards the slide of the automatic and clicked off the safety.

The elevator boy rang the bell again.

"Come on, Johnny, let's go back," Angela said.

There was a strange tension in her voice that made Johnny look closely at her. She was changed. Her soft, pale features were livid with excitement. Her lips were drawn in a tight pencil line and her nostrils quivered. He watched the muscles of her jaw tighting and relaxing, and the tiny pulsating of her throat.

"Take it easy, kid," Johnny said.

She looked at him as if he were standing far away.

And then he heard steps in the apartment. He heard the clicking of the lock and then the elevator man pressed a button and opened the door.

Dutton looked surprised. He said, "Angela, honey." And then, "Johnny! Well, what a pleasant surprise. Come on in."

He turned and led them into the sunken living room. Johnny could hear the elevator descending behind him.

"What happened to you?" Dutton said to Johnny.

"Just an accident."

"Bad?"

"It'll be all right."

"Good. Drink?"

"Rye straight'll be fine."

"Nothing for me," Angela said.

Johnny looked around the apartment. It was lush. The living room was built in two levels and the far wall was made of glass overlooking the East River. Half the room was gray, and half dark yellow. The modernistic furniture was finished in onyx and oxblood, and indirect lighting came from nowhere out of the walls.

"Cozy place," Johnny said.

"I call it home," Dutton said. Then he smiled. "Social call or business?"

"What do you think?"

"Why think when you're going to tell me anyway?" Dutton said.

Johnny studied the man. He was over six-two, topped by silvery white hair. Although he must have been over fifty, his body was muscular, his face tanned and unwrinkled. He lounged easily on the couch as if he didn't have a care in the world. He looked good-natured and pleasant. He'd always given Johnnny the breaks at the Blue Swan. There'd be no reason to dislike him.

Dutton wasn't looking at Johnny. He was talking to Angela.

"You're beautiful, baby," he said. "Has anyone told you that today?"

"Not for a couple of hours," Angela said.

"I'm taking off for Florida in a week."

"So."

"My offer's still good."

"No, thanks," Angela said.

"I'm easy to get along with," the big man said. "I'll buy you all the ice cream cones you can eat and maybe a mink coat thrown in."

"In Florida?"

"Okay, I'll make it a mink bathing suit," he said. "Do I make that two tickets on the plane, baby?"

"No, thanks again," Angela said.

JOHNNY could feel his cheeks burning. He wouldn't play into Dutton's hands. It was supposed to make him angry and get him off guard. He wouldn't be tricked that easily.

"Dutton."

"What can I do for you, kid?" the man with the silvery hair said.

"Marlo's dead," Johnny said.

"Yeah?"

"Murdered," Johnny said.

"I don't like that at all," Dutton said.

"I didn't think you would."

"I don't like it any better than the gun you're holding in your pocket."

Johnny started.

"Might as well take it out, kid. I spotted it the minute you stepped out of the elevator."

Johnny took out the automatic and pointed it at him. "Okay."

"A thirty-two," Dutton said.

"You ought to know," Johnny said. "You used it on your partner. You robbed your own safe."

Dutton chuckled. "A thirty-two? Never used one in my life."

"And how about Benny?" Johnny said. "Is a thirty-two right for him?"

The smile drained out of Dutton's face and he looked at Johnny with hard eyes. "Leave the kid out of this," he said.

"Are you covering for him out of habit or have you got a reason this time?"

"He's just a kid," Dutton said as if speaking to himself. "He's wild and I guess he's spoiled. But he'll grow out of it."

"He could have done the job," Johnny said.

"He couldn't have. He's not a killer."

"But he certainly could have used the money. And so could you, for that matter. And while we're at it, how did you get out of the club so fast? How come the police didn't detain you there?"

"Maybe I wasn't there tonight."

"I'll bet," Johnny said.

"If I were you, I'd forget it," Dutton said. "You're 'way off the track."

Dutton put his right hand into his pocket slowly.

"Stop it!" Johnny yelled.

Dutton pulled out a pack of cigarettes and pinched one out. Then he put his left hand into his pocket and pulled out a cigarette lighter.

Johnny could feel the automatic trembling in his hand.

"Why don't you use your head?" Dutton said. "Who else in the club could have gotten the combination to that safe?"

Johnny waited for him to go on.

"Maybe a head waiter, maybe a bookkeeper, maybe a wild young kid, or maybe a beautiful gal that no one would mind having around. You know, that's a nice green bag you have there, Angela," Dutton said without giving Johnny a chance to speak. "It matches the color of your eyes."

He took a step toward Angela.

"Keep away from her," Johnny said.

"Florida is nice and warm this time of year," Dutton said.

Angela said, "Go to hell."

"How much dough do you have in that nice green bag?"

"Leave her alone," Johnny said.

Dutton smiled thinly. "Suppose a gal had reason to believe that the police would question her in a couple of hours. And suppose, just suppose they would confront her with the fact that she was more chummy with the murdered man than was commonly suspected. Mightn't she, with feminine impulsiveness, be carrying the loot with her, for a fast getaway?"

Johnny tightened the grip on his gun. "Shut up," he said.

"Wouldn't a thirty-two be the kind of gun a gal might use? And the safe," Dutton went on. "Tell me, Angela, baby. How did you get the safe combination out of Marlo? With a bottle of whisky or did you use your feminine wiles?"

"You swine," Angela said.

Johnny could hear her labored breathing behind him.

"Shoot him, Johnny, shoot him."

DUTTON'S expression hadn't changed. "Go ahead, Johnny," he said. "But first ask her just how well she knew Marlo. Ask her to show you that nice green bag."

"You're a liar. Show him he's a liar, Angela," Johnny said.

"She won't show you anything," Dutton said and laughed.

Johnny kept his eyes glued on Dutton. He could hear Angela behind him.

"You're just the same as Marlo," she said. "Just the same as all of them."

"You've been took, Johnny," Dutton said calmly. "You've been took."

And then Johnny heard Angela's voice behind him. It was coarse and hard. He almost didn't recognize it. "Drop the gun, Johnny," she said. "*Drop it.*"

"Better do as she says," Dutton said. He stepped back and sank down in the couch again. "Always the same," he observed. "Year after year always the same. Dames. Redheads with green eyes. Brunettes and blonds with baby blues."

Johnny heard his gun drop to the floor as if it were somewhere far away. It was all too impossible. He couldn't believe it. Angela. And yet, somehow, he understood that he had known all along.

"You fooled yourself kind of easy, kid," Dutton said.

"I love her," Johnny said. "I wouldn't admit it to myself because I loved her."

"He was going to marry me," Angela said. She uttered a dry, rasping laugh. "Oh, brother, how often I heard that one before!"

Johnny stared at her. He tried to find the softness and fine grace of her face. There had been a mellowness and warmth about her eyes. Long ago . . .

"I'm going to finish the job I started," she said. "It's simple. Johnny came up here to rob your safe the same as he did Marlo's. You shot him and he shot you. That's the way they'll find you both."

"But why?" Johnny asked.

"Why? There was seven thousand dollars in Marlo's safe. Seven thousand dollars—that means what I've been wanting to do all my life."

"But I was going to give you money," Johnny said.

"Sure, you and Marlo and Dutton and all the other guys. Angela, baby, be mine and I'll hand you the world on a silver platter. Passes and lousy cracks and dirty jokes that you had had to laugh at to get a job. And always a few drinks and be nice to me, Angela, sweetheart, be nice to me."

"But why did you pick me?" Johnny said.

"Because you were handy, Johnny. Just like little Angela you were handy." She pointed the gun at Dutton. "Get up and over to that safe," she snapped at him. "I know you've got money there."

Dutton got up slowly. He stretched himself, turned, and walked to an etching on the wall. He took down the picture and twisted the dial of the safe behind it. He snapped the little round safe open and stood perfectly still.

"You're making a mistake, Angela, baby," he said.

When he turned back he had a gun in his hand. It jumped twice and roared, the brass shells ejecting in a wide arc. Then there was silence.

She was on her knees, coughing. "I should have known it," she said falteringly. "Some guy pulled another fast one on little Angela."

Johnny was at her side. He lifted her up and put her on the maroon couch. "I'll get a doctor, Angela. Hold on."

She grinned at him foolishly.

"I'll be making money, sweetheart," he said hurriedly. "I'll get the best lawyer in the country. We'll prove that you shot Marlo in self-defense. Then, when you're well enough, we'll go away together."

Her lips moved and he read the words. "I'm kind of tired of those trips," she said. "I've gone away too often."

"But not with me," Johnny said, "I love you. Don't you see, I *really* love you?"

And suddenly all the hardness and tough lines had disappeared and she

looked at him gently. "You really love me? Do you *really* love me, Johnny? Gee . . ."

There wasn't much trouble with the police after that. When they found the money on Angela and listened to Dutton's story, they let Johnny go.

And Johnny headed back to the ivories one step at a time. It was all blues stuff too. Night-time and Angela and the Redhead Blues. Top vocalists recorded his stuff and where before bandleaders had stalled him off, now everyone was begging for a new song.

During all that time the big man with the white hair took care of him.

"I'm a sucker," Dutton used to say. "Damned if I'm not a sucker for liking you.". He said it thoughtfully.

"Maybe you're only grateful that it was Angela and not your kid nephew who did the job."

Dutton looked worried. "The kid *has* been wild. But he'll straighten out. He's young. He'll get it out of his system."

Johnny smiled.

"You ought to get Angela out of *your* system," Dutton said.

"As easy as that?" Johnny asked.

"Sure, kid. You're not the first one it's happened to. Write it out of your system. Write a song about Angela and about all the guys who built the bitterness that was burning her soul. You can call it the doublecross boogie."



Free Wheeling to Hades

By Norman A. Daniels

(*Continued from page* 32)

the money Renshaw had promised. They didn't get that money. I did!

"You see, Spriggs has three heirs. He hated them all. He made no will and some time ago he determined to give away as much of his money as he could. Spriggs wanted to do the giving himself, or be close by to learn how his generosity was received. He was doing pretty good for himself too, and Renshaw was afraid he'd die broke. Only a gambler could have arranged a game of bluff like that. I thought it might be Renshaw."

"You didn't go wrong," Johnson said. "Renshaw still thinks Gibson was trying a doublecross and he's made a statement. This, in conjunction with Mrs. Gibson's, just about closes the case. You can go any time you like."

"Oh, no," Crain grinned. "I'm staying here until every cop in town learns I'm no longer wanted. Imagine getting shot now—after what I've been through? I'm not moving, lieutenant."

Copper on Crutches



By
Dan Gordon

When Ben Bradley stopped a bullet in his leg, it didn't stop his sleuthing or his scrapping. It only meant he had to do his fighting on one gam.

IN THE darkness he tightened the twisted leather belt that kept the blood from spurting from the wound above his knee. He didn't want to sleep because he had to hear whoever came to open the café. The tile felt cold beneath him as he lay on the kitchen floor. He wished he had his coat, but he didn't have. It was one of the things he remembered—that the louse who had shot him had taken the coat and fled.

Ben Bradley hadn't seen their faces as they dragged him in through the rear door. The alley had been dark.

Now, with the light flaring up and the door swinging open he saw the face of the girl who entered very clearly. She didn't say anything, but he saw the white smock fill out as she quickly drew in her breath.

Ben Bradley said, "Baby, you're late. Remind me to dock your pay."

"What are you—"

"Resting," Ben Bradley told her. "I was passing by and got tired all at once—about the time I took a slug in the leg. You got a phone in this joint?"

The girl said, "Yes. Yes, I'd better phone for a cop."

"You got one," Ben said. "Slightly used. Maybe you need a fresh one at that. Tell them the name is Bradley, and I said they should send the young doctor—the one who knows how to read."

She started to rustle her way through the door that led from the kitchen to the café, but halfway through she turned and faced him. "Are you shot bad?" she asked.

From his reclining position Ben Bradley looked up at her. "When you're shot," he said, "it's bad. There's no other way to get shot. If you mean am I dying—no. I got a slug in my leg."

She said, "Be back in a minute," and passed through the swinging door.

The door moved slowly, then, and a gaunt gray head poked in. Ben had seen such heads before—once when he'd guarded an art gallery he had seen a famous painting of a medieval saint—and again when he'd visited the state penitentiary to talk to a life-term banker.

Ben said, "Come on in, Pop. Be out of your way in a minute."

"No hurry," the old man said weakly. "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"Sure. But while it's heating, you mind helping me out to a table? This tile is getting hard."

The old man said, "Certainly, sir," and moved spryly about the business of lighting a fire under an urn.

Ben tied a towel around his leg to immobilize the wooden spoon he'd used as a lever on the tourniquet, then leaned heavily on the old man's shoulder as they moved slowly out into the café.

His coat was there; he saw it hanging on the barren line of coat hooks. Relieved that his coat wasn't irretrievably lost, he grunted and lowered himself on a chair. In the front of the place, near the window, the girl was breaking paper rolls of change on the drawer of the cash register, letting them flow into the compartments with a pleasant, tinkling sound. The old man, having helped Ben to the chair, was returning to the kitchen.

Ben said, "What's her name?"

The old man had started to move away but he stopped suddenly. He turned obliquely, not facing Ben, and said, "Me? I'm Walter Stover."

"Not you. I mean the girl."

"Her? She's Eva Kline."

BEN nodded. The pain was there in his leg, but he had had worse pains. He thought the leg was broken and he was keeping his mind away from the soft, unpleasant grating sensation he felt when he moved his foot.

He said, "Mighty tidy hash house you run. Cleanest kitchen I've ever seen."

Stover ducked his lean gray head and scurried away to the kitchen. He came back with coffee and a stale doughnut. He said, "Fresh ones haven't come yet."

With the coffee too hot on his tongue and the steam smelling good in his nostrils, Ben didn't answer. His eyes were on the coat, neatly hung upon the peg, and his mind was kicking the thing around, trying to find an answer. He considered cross-

ing the room to get the coat, but when he moved he felt the bones grate. The room was fairly warm and it wasn't worth the effort.

Up near the cash register, the girl was keeping busy. Ben said, "You open the joint in style. With the amount of effort you've used so far, I could open the Stock Exchange."

The girl called Eva Kline smiled when she turned; her teeth were white and even. She said, "It takes time to do it right. I didn't at first, but they made me sorry when the men came around about sales tax and all sorts of things."

"Your own place?"

"Yes. Started on a GI loan."

She left the register and brought out a bucket of soapy water. Ben watched the flowing smoothness of her beneath the smock. She was swinging a heavy janitor's mop with an easy, practised stroke.

The part near the street door was finished, clean but still somewhat wet, when Harvey Beam, chief of detectives, came bustling in too briskly and nearly fell.

It wasn't very funny, but Ben said, *"Ooops!"* in a high falsetto, because he always leaned to the silly side when things could get no worse.

His superior glared at him across the soapy pool, and barked as only Beam would bark, "Never mind that. Let's have it, Bradley."

"Nothing much, chief. Nothing big enough for you to come down here. I was driving by, I see a light. It's a flashlight moving around, so I pull around in back and tag a punk coming out that way. While I was busy with him, his partner comes up out of an ashcan or somewhere and clips me from the side. We argue about that for a while, the three of us. Then they settle the question by putting a slug in my leg."

Harvey Beam said without warmth, "I see, Bradley. And did you fire?"

"No. Couldn't get my gun out." Remembering how he'd tugged and pulled at his holster, Ben Bradley glanced down.

Harvey Beam extended his hand and slid the gun up and down against the leather. He said, "It comes out easily now."

"Yeah," Ben said. "Where's the doctor?"

"Outside. I told him to wait."

Ben said, "Invite him in. I been waiting two hours already."

The edge was there in his voice, but he didn't care right now. Working for a jerk was fine as long as you had your health. When you felt bad, it got pretty painful.

THEY brought the doctor in, and a lab man Ben knew but slightly. The doctor said the leg was broken, and put splints on and said that everything would be fine as soon as he took out the lead. Harvey Beam kept repeating in his petulant voice that a man with Ben Bradley's experience ought to know better than to enter a dark building without a ready gun.

"The alley," Ben said again. "I hadn't gone into the building. The second guy clipped me while I was trying for the gun."

Harvey Beam's voice was crisp. "A clumsy operation. I learned more than that in law school."

Ben looked at him bleakly. "Did you? Hand me my coat."

He swung himself to his feet, leaning hard on the doctor's shoulder. In spite of his troubles, he was constantly having to look away from the girl. For his eyes flicked to her automatically as she moved around the room, and he grinned a little through the pain in his face. She was a great deal of girl. More girl than he'd seen in years.

Harvey Beam was crossing the room with Ben's coat draped loose on his arm when the envelope slid out of the folds and fell on the floor. The envelope made a heavy sound and broke open. A flat stack of banknotes fanned out.

"Yours, Bradley?"

"It's mine," Ben Bradley said, "if it falls out of my coat. But I don't think I had it before."

Harvey Beam said, "Hmmm" and adjusted a pair of spectacles on the bridge of his classic nose. Bending, he recovered the money and envelope, brought them to where Ben Bradley was leaning on the doctor.

There weren't many pieces of the green, Ben saw at once. But they didn't have to come by the bushel. They were hundred-dollar bills.

Beam was talking, all lawyer now. "How do you explain this, Bradley?"

"Explain it?" Ben fought down his resentment, conquered the impulse to jam a fist into Beam's sharp, suspicious face. The door from the kitchen swung open and Perry, the lab man, joined them. Ben said, "Right now I don't feel like thinking about it. Let's get me out of here."

"Just a moment," said Beam. "Perry, come here. You're competent to identify handwriting, aren't you?"

The lab man reached for the envelope. "I'm competent, chief," he said, "but you don't just look at it. You've got to make comparisons. Want me to take it downtown?" He glanced at the envelope, ready to hand it back, looked at it again. "Wait a minute. *This* is one I know. I'd want to check carefully, of course, if this were a trial, you know. But I'm fairly sure of this one. It was written by Herbert Lowe."

Ben Bradley sat down on the chair. The name of the underworld boss was not a startling thing, but it meant that his boss Beam would probably make a speech. Ben said, with some impatience, "Let's get on with it, men."

"Your attitude," said Harvey Beam, coming close with his probing eyes, "leaves something to be desired."

"It's because I feel so good, boss." Ben stared at his splints with sour distaste. "I always get happy as hell every time I break my leg."

Harvey Beam tapped the envelope flat on his palm. "Your leg may be the least of your worries, Bradley. I don't know exactly what's going on, but I know it's something phony. This money's addressed to you."

BEHIND the little bar on the other side of the room, Eva Kline was listening. Ben met her eyes in the mirror, but she bowed her head and resumed her work with the glasses and towel. He didn't get it, it didn't add up. If the joint were a front for another racket, the girl wouldn't mop the floor. Hunger and marriage were the only two things that would force a dame with a figure like Eva's to make with a heavy mop.

Ben shook his head and looked up at Harvey Beam. He said, "Well, what d'ya know?"

"Bradley, what were you doing in this neighborhood? What made you happen by at three o'clock in the morning?"

"I got a phone call," Ben said wearily. "From a stoolie I know down on Sanders Street. He wanted to talk to me."

Beam said, with the bite in his voice, "Are you in the habit of having them call you at home?"

"If they want to. They help me a lot, and the department number sometimes scares them off."

"So, you were going to Sanders Street. Was there any particular reason why you should drive by here?"

"None. Except it's the shortest way. I wasn't out for the ride."

Harvey Beam said, much too softly, "You seem to resent my questions. If I were in your position, I'd mend my attitude."

Ben Bradley had had enough, and now he fixed the chief of detectives with a cold, contemptuous eye. "Broken legs are always rough on my disposition. So is working for a louse."

That broke up the party nicely. Harvey Beam stalked out after promising to include that remark in his

report. Ben took that to mean he was being reported to the Board of Commissioners, but he didn't much care just then. He didn't seem to care much about anything, he reflected, since Harvey Beam had got on the force.

He thought about it on the way to the hospital, and while they dressed his wound. Harvey Beam was the world's worst example of the clean-cut American Boy. Galloping out of law school, he had launched a campaign of indignation against a couple of questionable dance halls and an after-hours booze joint that sold maybe ten quarts a week. The papers had snatched it up because news was scant at the time; grateful civic groups had done the rest.

Now Harvey Beam was chief of detectives at the age of twenty-eight and he had learned to present his clean-cut profile in the best Hollywood manner whenever the shutters clicked.

They would click, Ben Bradley reflected, more vigorously than ever, if Harvey Beam could make this one stick, could prove that he, Ben Bradley, was guilty of taking a bribe.

Four hours sleep had him feeling well but not happy. He shaved, dressed with difficulty, and devoted fifteen minutes to practice with the new crutches. They made his armpits sore. He couldn't seem to swing along with the ease he'd always taken for granted when watching convalescents. By the time he'd negotiated the stairs and made his way to the curb, he was swearing softly and steadily. The cab took a long time to come.

At the café again, Eva Kline looked up with swift recognition as he banged in through the door. She said, "I thought you'd be in bed for a week. Don't tell me they've got you working."

"No. But if you've got an unpopular booth, I'd like to use it awhile."

He felt the question behind her stare, and he hoped she wouldn't ask why he was here, for he didn't really know. He did know it was here he'd been shot, and because he couldn't get around very easily, he had come here to find out why.

Eva said, "Second one from the kitchen." She frowned and began to write menus with a ball point fountain pen.

Ben Bradley paused to admire her handwriting and the straight part in her hair, then headed for the booth in the rear, placing his crutches awkwardly, moving with off-balance swings.

Assorted customers came and went while he sat and drank two beers. Ben looked them over carefully. They were standard for the neighborhood—a little cleaner, maybe, than those in the average café, but otherwise run of the mill. A sprinkling of office workers, a delivery man, a drunk.

You could sit in a joint like this for days, he thought, unless you got a break. You could sit, when you ought to be out asking questions, filing the answers away.

Only, asking questions meant leg work. And leg work called for two legs.

Ben glared as the front door opened again. If it came up a pair of of chattering stenos, he resolved to cut his throat.

He smiled when he saw Larry Parker, one of the boys who hung around underworld boss Herbert Lowe.

PARKER covered the room with a careless flicker of his eyes, eyes that were black and enamel-bright. He moved to the cash register and drummed his thin hard fingers on the top of the cigar case.

Ben couldn't hear what was said, but he saw the girl look up, and as he carefully lowered his head and raised his eyes to watch, he caught the warning jerk of her head, read *tip-off* in her glance.

The racketeer turned his back on

the room, lighted a cigarette, and left.

Lifting an empty beer bottle, Ben set it down again, hard. The girl came over and said, "Yes, sir. Another beer?"

"Sit down."

"I'm sorry. I never sit with customers. It's one of my rules."

"One you're breaking. What did Parker want?"

"I don't know."

"One thing I hate," Ben said, "is a sneaking, lying dame. Sit down before I trip you."

She acted as if she might turn and run, but she stopped when he touched his crutch.

She sat.

"Now," Ben said, "you tipped brother Parker that I was here. What made you think he'd care?"

"Maybe he's a good customer," said Eva. "And maybe he thinks like I do—cops ruin his appetite."

"We're doing better. This morning it didn't add up at all—a nice girl making an honest living—that's one thing had me bothered. I couldn't figure a frame with them using this café. Now it looks some better. The lady don't like cops."

Her mouth was straight and the life had gone from her face. Looking at her, Ben realized not only that she was beautiful but that far from wanting to trip her, he wanted to stroke her hand. It would be nice if she liked cops. She could make one the luckiest guy in the world if she liked one particular cop.

His voice was softer as he said, "Any particular reason, this grudge against the police?"

"Plenty," said Eva Kline. "Now, do you mind if I go?"

Ben shook his head. She left him and went back to the kitchen. While she was back there, Thompson came in.

Bull Thompson was in uniform, and the heavy nightstick he carried, backed by a nasty temper, had made him feared and hated on every beat he patrolled. Pausing near the door, he swept the place with his bloodshot, belligerent eyes, then lumbered toward the rear. If he recognized Ben, he did not speak. He kicked the door aside and passed into the kitchen.

Ben heard the rumbling voice. It went on for a while, then it was still. Suddenly there came another sound as the old man cried out brokenly in terror and in pain.

Ben grabbed at the table. It was light and it tilted beneath his weight He grunted and caught the back of the booth, hoisted himself to his feet. One crutch eluded him, but he captured it finally and worked his way to the kitchen.

The old man, Walter Stover, was down, lying limply against a heavy tub of newly peeled potatoes. The girl was staring at the uniformed cop, in choking, helpless rage. Bull Thompson was grinning, now.

"Remember," Bull said as Ben came in, "remember what I said."

The girl said, "We don't need two of you. One can do the job very well—beating one poor old man."

Ben Bradley saw the slow trickle of blood from the corner of Walter Stover's mouth, and it made him a little sick. Not the blood, for he'd seen lots of that in his time, but the old man looked so damned frail!

Ben said: "Start talking sense, folks."

"Stay out of it," Bull Thompson told him. "You got trouble enough."

Ben marked the contempt in Thompson's voice. Bull might be a bruiser and a cop who cut corners, but he was by no means stupid. He'd hardly dare use that tone to Ben Bradley if things weren't rotten downtown.

"Get smart," Ben said softly. "You're not growling at a newsboy. This is me, Ben Bradley."

"You braggin'?" answered Bull. "You look like a guy with one leg to me. And not too honest at that. If I want to slap this punk around—"

He broke off and made a threatening move.

The old man's eyes went wide with fear and he tried to roll out of the way. Bull laughed in an unpleasant manner.

The sneering chuckle broke off abruptly when Ben slugged him under the ear.

BULL THOMPSON went down, but so did Ben. You couldn't throw a punch like that without falling—not with but one good leg. Ben came up first because he had expected to go down. Bull, somewhat dazed, was somewhat slower.

Slower, but also more deadly, for as he hauled himself to his feet he was reaching for his gun.

Ben watched the clawing hand of Bull Thompson moving for the hip, and then he went for his own gun. He had dropped both crutches when he fell and now he was leaning, half crouching, against the kitchen wall. The gun came out in one smooth motion and steadied in his hand.

Bull Thompson faced it and quit like a dog with his own gun just clearing the holster.

The room was very still. The girl was flattened against the other wall, her lips parted in a soundless scream. On the floor, the man called Stover eyed the minions of the law with wild and abject fear. Ben Bradley kept his eyes on Bull Thompson's. One little part of his mind made note of the fact that the gun which wouldn't budge last night had worked like a charm today. The thought made him grin, but his gun didn't move as he said:

"Drop it, Bull. Let it go."

Thompson opened his fingers and the gun clattered against the clean tile floor.

"Move back," Ben said, and when Thompson obeyed, Ben sat down. No one moved as he hitched himself over and picked up Thompson's gun. Looking more comic than threatening as he sat spraddle-legged on the floor with his right leg huge in its cast, he said:

"I won't need you any more, Bull. Go back and frighten the children."

Bull Thompson tried to speak, but his voice wouldn't come at first, then, as he fought down his rage, he said in what for him was a quiet tone, "I hope you had fun, sucker. 'Cause the next time I catch you on my beat I'll be able to run you in."

"Anytime," Ben said cheerfully. "You're talking to a superior, but I won't insist on the sir."

Bull spat on the floor and left. From the front, the voices of customers filtered in, complaining about the service. Eva Kline started to say something, changed her mind and followed Thompson. Old man Stover painfully gained his feet and handed Ben Bradley a crutch.

"Like to thank you," the old man said. His tone was muffled and halting. "Something I thought I'd never see, a guy that's a decent cop."

Ben said, "There's plenty of them. And not many like Bull."

The old man grunted. He limped to the refrigerator and said over his shoulder, "Want me to fix you a sandwich?"

"Sure. Might as well keep my strength." He had a hunch he would need it. Bull Thompson's manner hadn't been that of an ordinary patrolman dealing with a detective. And Bull was nobody's fool.

Stover presented a sandwich liberally adorned with olives. When Ben expressed his thanks, the old man said, "Skip it, son. Far as I'm concerned, you can eat here free for life."

Ben grinned and went back to his booth out front, wondering idly what Stover's shapely boss would think if she knew her cook was offering a lifetime of meals on the tab. He slid into the booth and arranged his leg. As before, he faced the door.

THERE wasn't much business in the afternoon. He was growing drowsier and the pain was back in

his leg, brought on, perhaps, by the fall. Nodding and blinking his eyes, he thought about his gun, tightly stuck in the holster last night, free and easy today. If it had worked that well in the alley, he might not have a broken leg. He certainly would not have been slugged. . . . The table looked fine and inviting. Ben lowered his head till it touched his arms and presently he was drowsing.

The voice said crisply, "Where is he?"

Ben came awake with an unpleasant start and batted his eyes toward the café front. The girl was facing his way. So was Harvey Beam.

Beam came back to the booth. Patrolman Bull Thompson was with him, and an officer Ben didn't know.

"I felt," said Harvey Beam, "that you might not accept my orders as valid unless I gave them myself."

He made no mention of Ben's brawl with Thompson. Nor did Bull say anything, but his eyes were narrow with hate.

Ben kept his eyes on the classic nose. He said quietly, "Go on, chief."

"From now until the time the Commissioners have made a formal inquiry, you are to consider yourself suspended. Any action you may take will be considered the act of a private citizen."

"Such as pointing a gun at Bull, here?"

"That or any similar disturbance of the peace."

"I catch on slow," Ben said. He looked up at Harvey Beam as if he were seeing that staunch young defender of the public good in a new and different light. "All this time I knew you were a heel, but it never occurred to me that you were crooked."

"Your opinion," said Beam stiffly, "is unlikely to influence my career."

Ben shifted his leg in search of comfort, and Harvey Beam jumped back. Busy with thoughts of his own, Ben hardly noticed the action. Why should this particular café have been chosen for the frame? Why he, Ben Bradley, was the victim was easier to answer. Any attempt to sew up the town would necessitate the removal of honest, efficient officers, and a reputation like Ben's would place him high on the list. . . . Ben realized suddenly that Harvey Beam had seen the girl.

Beam had unconsciously assumed the voice he used when addressing women's clubs. He was saying, "Any attempt at civic reform must begin with the law enforcement agencies. We must weed out the dishonest cop."

"Where'd you learn that?" Ben put in admiringly.

"In law school—" Harvey Beam said, and cut himself off. Then he added in a different tone, "I trust you will take my advice in the spirit it is meant. As a precaution, it might be well if you gave Officer Thompson your gun."

Ben said, "Come and get it, Bull," and he smiled upon Officer Thompson. Harvey Beam looked expectant, but Bull didn't move at all.

Keeping his eyes on them, Ben spoke to the girl. "Get the old man out here."

The silence held while Stover shuffled into the room. He walked with the dragging step of a man on his way to the chair. When he spoke, there was hopelessness in his voice. He said, "Well, what do you want?"

"Some reasons," Ben said softly. "I want to know why Bull was working you over and why you took it so well. It takes a lot of shoving around to make a guy that meek."

The old man said, "I don't know nuthin' about anything that's got to do with cops."

"Let him alone!" The girl's voice was sharp and fierce. "Why can't you let him alone?"

"I've been adding it up," Ben said. "You and him and the way he don't like cops, and the way he looks, and all. Maybe somebody gave him a raw deal once. Maybe he took a rap."

The girl laughed, almost hysterical-

ly, and Ben knew he was getting it right.

Harvey Beam let his eyes crawl sideways, and the uniformed cop Ben didn't know moved to the old man's side.

Ben didn't move. He looked directly at Bull as he said, "Get that ape away from him."

Bull almost obeyed, and then he looked at Harvey Beam and sheepishly dropped his hand. Beam's eyes moved quickly from right to left, and his hand moved down toward his pocket.

It stopped when Ben's gun smacked the tabletop, beneath his flattened palm. "Stover," he said, "the one thing you got to know is, these tramps won't work you over. There are only a couple of them in the whole department. They haven't got the stuff. If you've been slapped around by the law, that's partially your fault. Citizens with moxie won't stand for such stuff."

"I'm no citizen," Stover said. "They take that away from you if you spend too long in the pen."

Ben said, "You're a man, aren't you? Or did they take that away too?"

The girl sobbed, "Oh, you fool!"

THE old man moved in among them, and he seemed to grow straight and tall. He stopped before Harvey Beam, and the chief of detectives was having trouble meeting the cold blue eyes.

"No," said Stover. "They didn't take that away. I'll tell you, Bradley, and we'll see what happens then."

Ben said, "Take your time."

Bull Thompson opened his mouth but closed it when Ben's fingers closed suggestively over the butt of the gun.

"I spent quite some time in the pen," Stover said. "So there wasn't much I could do when the chief of detectives sent word they were going to use my place."

"Your place?" asked Ben. "You own it?"

"Mine," Stover said, "and my daughter's. After I went to the pen, we changed her name to Kline. Came in handy getting licenses to open the café. Now I guess we're finished. I knew the picnic was over when cops would approach an ex-con to get help in framing you."

"You weren't one of the guys in the alley. And you didn't do the phoning that got me out of bed."

"No. I wouldn't go for it. I just gave them the keys to the place and told them we'd open up late."

Ben said, "I can take it from there. If Beam was getting rid of me, that means he's sold out to Herb Lowe." He smiled up at Beam, and went on. "Planting the dough on me was probably Lowe's idea. He wouldn't care about its being his handwriting on the envelope; he knows he's too big a boy to be thrown by a minor rap He also knows that even *he* couldn't get away with killing a cop in this town. So he had you frame me instead."

"I forgot," Stover said mildly, "while they were telling me how safe it was, they spoke of fixing your gun. Something about running a wire through the holster above the sight."

"Not taking a chance," Ben added, "with just unloading the gun. That way I might be lucky enough to roll away and reload. So they fix me up just fine. Stover, phone the Mayor."

"What?"

"The Mayor. He's straight. Tell him what you told me. Then tell him how things are here."

Harvey Beam snarled, "How are things?" and fired through his coat.

The bullet splintered the cheap wood at the back of Bradley's head, and he cursed himself for his inattention while he swung his gun between the two bluecoats and hurled his crutch at Beam.

The crutch bored into Beam's stomach, and that young man bent dou-

(Continued on page 79)

The Face in the Mirror

By
Sam D. Cohen



The true story of two men whom Fate cast in the same mold. And the wrong one was destined to play the Raffles role.

SOMETIMES Fate, in one of her freakish moods, confounds the best of experts. But nowhere did a whimsical destiny move so strangely as in the case of Adolf Beck, the man to whom unimagina-

ble things happened. No Hollywood scenarist flourished in those days, in London, around the turn of the century, but the elements of unparalleled coincidence that shocked England then have from the beginning of the written word occupied the fancy of men of imagination.

For here Nature, in one of her greatest whimsies, made two men so completely alike that criminal experts, Scotland Yard, itself, indeed beloved intimates, were hopelessly baffled.

And, for a time, justice herself was blind.

Yet in view of the fate of Adolf Beck it now becomes virtually impossible to convict a man unless the evidence against him is well-nigh unbreakable.

It began in December, 1896. Adolf Beck, walking in the evening in the Westminster district of London, was accosted by a woman who challenged him in menacing tones: "I know you —you are a thief!"

Beck passed on hastily, but the woman dogged him down the street. A police officer appeared on the scene and the harassed man called him over. The woman promptly accused Beck of having robbed her of two watches and a ring. The officer had no alternative but to place the man under arrest.

THE story of Beck's arrest appeared in the next day's papers and women from all over London came forward and identified him as having robbed them of jewelry and money. According to their stories, the prisoner had passed himself off to each of them as a nobleman, immensely wealthy, and anxious to take them around the world on his yacht, or to establish them at one or other of his castles or manors in the country.

Sometimes he would write them a heavy check—bogus—taking from them, sây twenty-five pounds, on the pretext that he had run out of cash "and the cursed banks are all closed now, don't you know."

Sometimes he would borrow a ring, as a guide in selecting the right fit of the superb "engagement ring" to be purchased on the next morning before the pair set out on their little adventure.

The women were unhesitating in their recognition of the man. The case against Adolf Beck became stronger still when the prosecution put in the box a witness, an ex-police sergeant, who testified that nearly twenty years before he had arrested the prisoner for the same offense, and that Beck had been convicted under the name of Smith and had received five years' penal servitude.

Yet Beck strongly insisted that he was innocent.

In fact, with such force and intensity of passion did he voice his indignation that the judge recalled the former police officer to the stand.

"You are an old man," the judge stated, "and you want to go happy to your grave. Do you still swear that this is the man?"

And the old man swore: "Without the shadow of a doubt I took this man into custody twenty years ago."

The former officer was substantiated when a handwriting expert testified that the handwriting of the convict Smith was absolutely identical with that of Adolf Beck; no two men could write so exactly alike by mere chance.

Beck tried in vain to establish an alibi. Twenty years before he had been in Peru, and was there for some years. And at the time of some, at least, of the robberies now charged against him he was in Norway. But still he was found guilty and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude.

As he was removed to a cell he protested loudly that an injustice was being done. In prison he still affirmed his innocence; he told the chaplains and warders that when he would be free he would hunt the streets of London day and night for the clue that would enable him to prove to the world that he was an honorable man

and that a horrible mistake was done.

"Sooner or later," he stated, "the world will recognize the fact that I am a wronged man, a victim of a terrible series of mischances."

His attorney believed in him implicitly. By some means he came across the report of the doctor who had examined Smith these many years before and learned that this culprit had a scar on a part of his anatomy. Beck had not!

This information should have cleared up the entire matter. But it seems that in those days red tape obstructed justice in many cases as it does today. Though this new evidence was most vital, it fell upon deaf ears. Nothing more was heard of the matter until his attorney received the most impersonal reply from the Home Office:

"The Home Secretary does not feel justified in recommending any interference with the sentence of Adolf Beck."

Beck's life for the next few years was comparatively uneventful. Upon his release from prison he set himself resolutely to clear his name and to establish his innocence. He had very little money and this soon petered out. All his available time he spent interviewing the different witnesses who had appeared against him—all futile attempts. Thus matters continued until 1904.

IN MARCH of that year a woman, Pauline Scott, lodged a complaint with Scotland Yard that a man calling himself Lord Willoughby had robbed her. He had given her a bogus check, had taken an expensive ring of hers along with him to "copy," in order to present her with one more expensive. And he had taken her watch "to be repaired." Also, he had borrowed a sum of money from her, saying that his valet had forgotten to put some money in his pocket.

Inspector Ward of Scotland Yard was assigned to investigate this case. The inspector, after looking up the records, was struck by the similarity between this last fraud and the offenses for which Beck was convicted. Pursuing his inquiries, he learned that Beck was in the habit of frequenting a restaurant in Oxford Street. Inspector Ward took Miss Scott there and asked her if she could recognize among the people present the man who had defrauded her.

Suddenly the woman gave forth a yell.

"That is the man who stole my watch, money and ring!"

Her finger pointed to Beck. "It is all a mistake," pleaded the unhappy man.

This was a bad time in the life of Adolf Beck. In addition to Miss Scott, the accused was identified by other women who claimed he had swindled them. These were Rose Reece, Caroline Singer and Grace Campbell. A fifth woman, Lily King, picked Beck out from a number of men as the individual who, about two months before, had stolen her ring after giving her a check upon a non-existent bank.

On May 19, Beck was formally committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, and once more he made an impassioned appeal.

"Before God, My Maker," he protested, "I am absolutely innocent of every charge which has been brought against me. I have not spoken to, or seen, any of these women before they appeared against me."

One after another the women went into the witness box and swore that the prisoner was the man who had swindled them. In vain his counsel cross-examined them. Inspector Ward described the prisoner's arrest and the various circumstances leading up to it.

The issue was never in doubt. The jury, without the slightest hesitation, returned a verdict of guilty. After a short pause the judge announced that he would defer passing sentence till the next Session.

Throughout this hectic career of Adolf Beck it was significant that

never was a single stolen article found on Beck, nor could any be traced to him. However, the darkest hour is said to precede the dawn, and at last this seemingly persecuted individual was to come into his own.

On the evening of July 7, Inspector Kane paid a visit to the Tottenham Court Road Police Station. Here he learned that an elderly, well-dressed man calling himself William Thomas had been arrested that afternoon while in the act of pawning two rings which he had obtained by fraud from two sisters named Turner.

The trick by which he had been able to gain possession of the property belonging to the sisters seemed strangely familiar to the police officer, who had been present in court at both of Beck's trials. He entered Thomas's cell and observed the prisoner closely.

Before him sat an almost exact double of Adolf Beck. The same heavy gray hair, the same thick gray military mustache, the same firm chin, eyebrows densely shaded and arching after the same line, the same rather full, well-fed face. The only difference was in the line of the nose, and this was scarcely to be noticed except when the faces were carefully scrutinized in profile.

INSPECTOR KANE lost no time in reporting this matter to his superiors. As a consequence, Inspector Ward was sent to interview the prisoner, William Thomas, and came to the conclusion, for the first time, that possibly Beck was an innocent pawn of William Thomas.

Although Thomas refused to give any account of himself, a search of his room brought to light writing paper similar to that given to the women who appeared against Beck, pawn tickets, and other articles of incriminating character.

Meanwhile, two men were found, one of them his former landlord, who positively identified Thomas as the individual who had been convicted in 1877, under the name of John Smith. And then Pauline Scott, Lily King and Caroline Singer, who had sworn so positively that Beck was the man who had defrauded them, no sooner saw Thomas than they declared that he was the real culprit.

The Home Office quickly agreed that a terrible mistake had been committed and that Beck must be released. Accordingly, on July 9, twelve days after the arrest of William Thomas, Beck was set at liberty, and on the 27th, free pardons were granted him in respect of both his convictions.

On September 15, Thomas pleaded guilty at the Old Bailey in various charges of theft and was sentenced to five years in prison. In the course of his career he had used many aliases, and neither his rightful name nor his country of origin was ever satisfactorily established.

As for Adolf Beck, the sum of five thousand pounds was awarded him as small compensation for his unmerited imprisonment by an apologetic country.

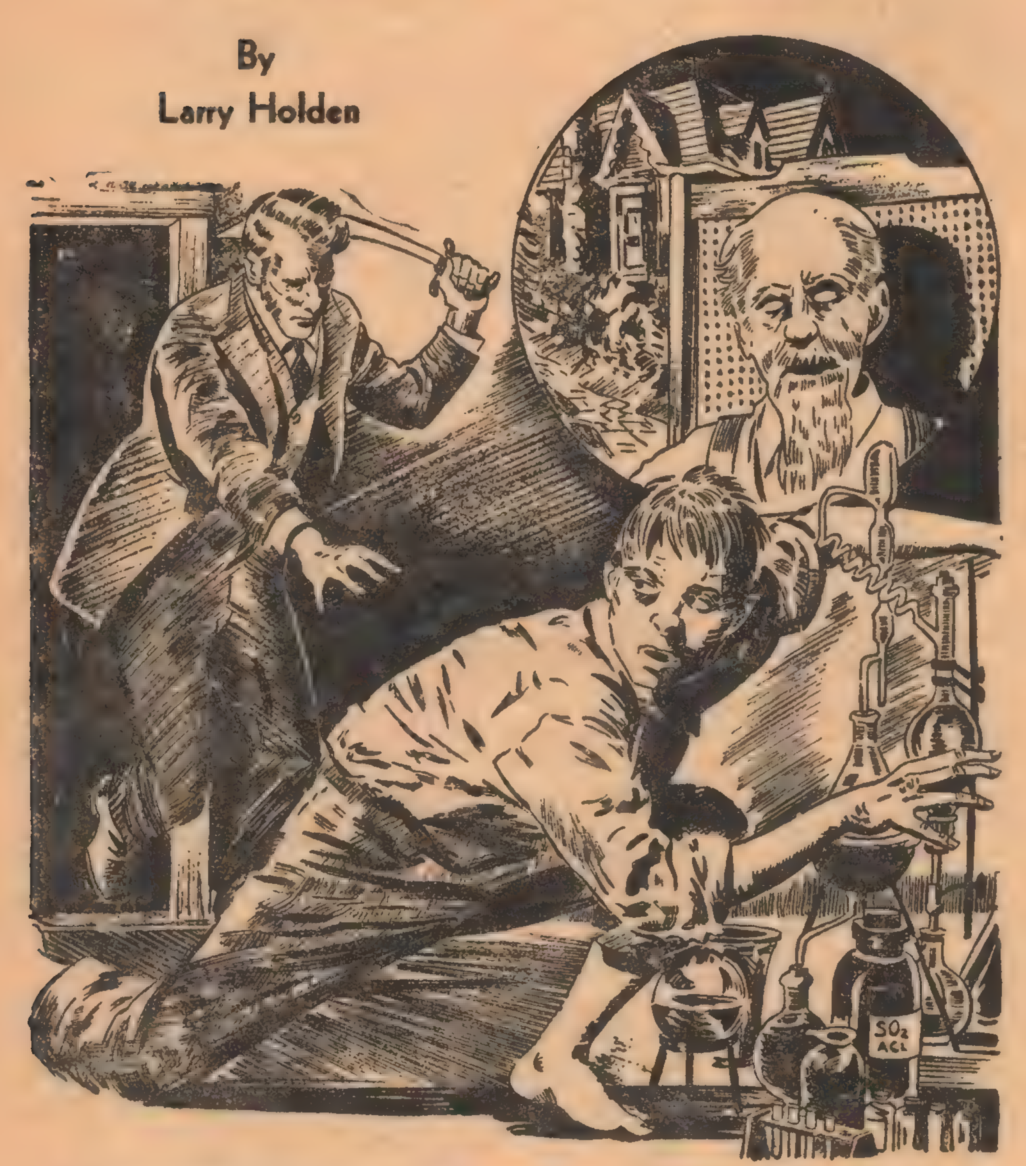
It would be a fitting conclusion to this story were it possible to say that Adolf Beck's closing years were full of good fortune and prosperity. Fate, however, decreed that failure should dog his footsteps to the last. In 1909, when he died, he was in very poor circumstances.

Was there ever a more amazing case of duplication not only in personal appearance, but in handwriting and other similarities? It is to be noticed that the doubling was not the relatively common case of one man at one given moment resembling another or in any one year of life. Here was the resemblance that had persisted year after year during twenty-seven long years.

The man who was like Beck in 1877 would be like him today, as he was like him in that fatal 1896. Until the death of Beck, in 1909, it would seem, neither would be safe from the consequences of any crime of the other.

House of Hate

By
Larry Holden



For young Anthony, the old mansion was a hell to live in. But it was a wonderful place for somebody to die in—violently. And Anthony, who had seen too much terror for a boy, was scheduled never to grow up to be a man.

THE boy came up the path with an intricate step that could almost have been a dance. He was an odd-looking boy. He was much too pale and so skinny that his head seemed too large, and his hands too large and his feet too large. He had an indrawn, unloved look, possibly because of the size of his startling, dark eyes.

Afterward, during the trial, Lieutenant Ryan, of Homicide, said they had turned that way because of violence and murder and the dark things the boy had seen.

But the lieutenant was Irish and dramatic, and he hadn't known young Anthony, or any of the others, before the killing in that grim house—the murder mansion, the papers called it.

Part tragic, part savage—the eyes of an uncared-for child—Anthony had always looked that way.

He had that look the afternoon he came up the path with the intricate step that was actually a dance of admiration for the knife he had made.

To him, it was a shining scimitar of the finest Damascus steel. It was a wicked-looking blade. He had made it from a broken, rusted sickle. He was a Moorish king when he brandished it; he was Muley Aben Hassan of barbaric Granada, challenging the cruel Spanish steel of Ferdinand and Isabella. He was in the thick of battle, and his actions became wilder and fiercer—till he heard the rubber tires of the wheel chair crunching down the steep path toward him.

His jaw dropped and his eyes became even more enormous. He dived for the rhododendron bush and frantically scrambled for cover beneath the dark, shining leaves. He lay scarcely breathing, peering out like a cornered animal.

But the old man in the chair had caught a glimpse of him, just enough to know that someone was hiding in the bushes, and his shrill voice rose in fear.

"What was that? What was that?" he cried, gripping the arms of his chair. "Jeff, there's somebody in the bushes there. See who it is. See who it is this instant!" He pounded his chair with hysterical hands.

The boy buried his face in the leaf mold as the heavy feet pounded down the path toward him. The branches were parted over his head and a heavy hand dragged him out into the path.

THERE was no fear in Anthony's face as he looked up at the big, blond man who gripped his arm. There was feral defiance in his eyes, as if he knew that nothing worse could happen to him than what had already happened in the past. And he was not afraid of the big man with the broken face. That was Jeff, the man Grandfather had hired to push his wheel chair, feed him and amuse him. Jeff had been a prizefighter. Anthony fought his grip because he had to show his defiance, not only to Jeff but to his grandfather and to the whole world.

"It's only the kid," Jeff called up the path.

The old man's fear turned to anger. "Bring him here," he snarled. "Drag him if he won't walk."

Jeff mumbled, "Aw, take it easy, kid," but Anthony fought him every inch of the way, and he was panting when the big man pushed him in front of the wheel chair.

The old man tilted his chin and demanded querulously, "Well, what were you up to in the bushes there, boy?"

Anthony stared woodenly at a point three inches to the left of his grandfather's shoulder. "Hiding," he said.

"Hiding, eh? Why?"

"From you."

"Think of that now! What were you going to do—throw stones at me as I went by? Answer me, boy!"

The boy answered steadily, "You told me to keep out of your sight, and that's what I was doing."

"Don't get flip with me, boy, or I'll have Jeff tan your bottom." He peered suspiciously at the boy. "What's that you're holding behind your back, hey?"

Anthony brought out his homemade scimitar. "I made it. I was playing with it."

The old man reared back in his chair. "Take it away from him! Take it away from him!" he shrieked. That was sheer dramatics, for when Jeff took the knife, he leaned forward

in his chair and shook a bony forefinger in the boy's face. "I'll teach you to point a knife at me," he said with stern satisfaction. "I'll teach you, you young savage. Jeff!"

This time the boy did not squirm when Jeff seized his collar and spanked him with a heavy, hamlike hand. He stood straight and stiff until it was over.

"Now," said the old man contentedly, "go to your room and stay there until I tell you to come out."

Without a word the boy walked stolidly toward the forbidding red house on the crest of the hill. The house wasn't a true red. It was the crusty red of old blood. The reporters didn't use too much imagination when they called it the murder mansion. It had that look even before the killing.

The old man watched the boy until the bushes hid him from view.

"I should never have taken him in after his parents died," he said sharply. "I should have sent him to a boarding school. You know how his parents died?"

Jeff said expressionlessly, "You told me."

"Gas," said the old man, ignoring him. "In their sleep. One of those infernal gas logs in the fireplace. Defective, it was supposed to be. Ha! Even the gas people didn't think it was that defective. Somebody turned it on, that's what they thought."

"Is that a fact," Jeff said indifferently. He had heard this story a dozen times.

"Yessir, turned it on—on purpose. And why did they keep questioning that little imp like they did? Answer me that!"

"You got me," Jeff yawned.

"Because they *knew!*" the old man said triumphantly. "They knew in their hearts it was that little monster. But they knew, too, that they'd never be able to prove it, he's so sly. And him only ten at the time. He's a bad one, through and through."

"Oh, I dunno," said Jeff, contentious because he was bored. "He seems okay to me. He's just funny-looking, that's all. He'd be okay if you and the other two didn't keep snapping at him all the time. In fact" —he eyed the old man with dislike— "those nephews of yours are afraid you're gonna leave the kid something in your will."

The old man said ominously, "Don't you like your job here anymore, Jeff?"

"Hell, no," said Jeff frankly. "I'm just hanging around because you got me down for five G's in that lousy will of yours. I wanna open a health farm, and that'll just about make a down payment with what I got."

The old man gave him a sharp glance, then decided to take it as a joke. "Hee, hee, hee, I like you, Jeff," he giggled. "You don't butter me up, do you?"

"Would it get me ten G's in the will?" Jeff asked curiously.

The old man tittered mysteriously and gave another glance toward the house. The boy was just entering the front door, passing into the gloomy hall.

The hall became famous later as the "sepulchral corridor." It wasn't actually as bad as that, but it was dismal enough—a joyless relic of depressing Victorian elegance.

ANTHONY plodded up the stairs as his Uncle Dolph scampered down. Uncle Dolph had the wizened, monkeylike face of an intelligent jockey. In fact, before the old man had peremptorily summoned him to the murder mansion, Uncle Dolph had spent more time at the race tracks than was good for either him or the horses. He was a little too fond of an easy dollar. His close-set eyes lighted maliciously.

"Hi, there, Desperate Dan," he called to Anthony with mock gaiety, "what were you trying to do out there—stab the old man? I was watching from the window."

Anthony hated the nickname of

Desperate Dan and he showed it too plainly. "I wasn't trying to stab anybody!" he said fiercely.

"You can't fool me, Desperate Dan. You were trying to cut his throat." Uncle Dolph winked and dropped his voice. "Not that it wouldn't be a good idea. The next time you'll have to be a little faster."

The boy clenched his fists. "You go to—"

"Now, now, naughty word," Uncle Dolph grinned. This was one of the brighter moments in his now dreary life. "The trouble with you, Desperate Dan, is that you're not subtle enough. You should have a gun and take pot shots at him from behind a tree. But you'll learn after you get a few more killings to your credit. You're young yet."

Upstairs a door opened and a heavy voice called irritably, "Are you getting those papers or aren't you, Dolph?"

Dolph barked, "Keep your shirt on. I'm getting them." As he passed Anthony, he whispered, "I'll lend you my shotgun any time you want it for you-know-what, Desperate Dan." Whistling, he trotted down the stairs.

Anthony was white and trembling as he climbed the rest of the stairs. A thick-set man with dark rimmed glasses was standing in the doorway of the room across the hall from his, and he mumbled, "'Lo, Uncle William."

Uncle William peered near-sightedly at him. "What's Dolph up to down there?" he asked fretfully. "I'm trying to get the accounts drawn up."

"Nothing. He was just . . . teasing me a little, I guess."

"Teasing you!" William looked exasperated. "A fine way to waste time when there's work to do. Well, what are you looking so sour about? Can't you stand a little teasing?"

"Not that kind! He said I was trying to stab Grandfather and I wasn't."

"I daresay," said Uncle William drily. "It'll take more than a knife to help the old gentleman out of this world, I'm afraid. And I'll venture your Uncle Dolph offered to help you, didn't he?"

Coming up the stairs, Dolph heard that and cried angrily, "I know what you're up to! You're hoping the kid'll run to the old man and tattle, that's what!" he bounded up the hall. He cuffed Anthony across the ear. "Just try tattling, kid, and I'll twist your skinny little neck. The old man wouldn't believe you anyway. Know what he calls this hypocrite here? His holiness, that's what. The old man's got his number, all right."

Anthony escaped into his room, but even the closed door could not shut out the sound of their bitter voices. He wandered disconsolately to the window and stared out across the steep hill. The old man's wheel chair stood on one of the short levels in the path, and his grandfather sat sleeping in the sun. Anthony did not see Jeff, but he was not surprised. Jeff usually seized such moments to sneak into the kitchen for a forbidden sandwich. Jeff was always hungry.

The boy stood with his nose pressed against the glass for a few moments, then shambled over to his closet. Digging far back into it, be brought out his chemistry set. That, too, was forbidden but he had bought it with his own money and he guarded the secret jealously, adding to it whenever he could, filching bits from the gardener's shack, the kitchen, the cellar. Solemnly he spread it on the floor, then sat back on his heels and deliberated.

He had almost decided to make ink when it occurred to him that it would be a fine thing to get rid of the mice in the kitchen. That would please the cook, who was always grumbling about the mice. He liked the cook. He reached for the little jar he had filled in the gardener's shack.

HE WAS so intent over his self-imposed task that he did not hear the door open behind him, but

when it closed he whirled and wildly tried to hide the chemistry set with his body. It was only Jeff. The big man held out the scimitar he had taken from the boy.

"Here," he said, "I brung this back to you, kid."

Anthony stammered his thanks and eagerly took the blade. Jeff scowled.

"Don't thank me," he said. "I only did it to spite the old goat down there. He gives me a pain. This whole house gives me a pain. What's that junk you're playing with now?"

Out of gratitude for the return of the knife Anthony said, "That's my chemical set. I'm making something for mice. Not for them, exactly. Against them. To kill them."

Jeff looked startled and said, "Chemicals! Aincha afraid to handle that stuff, kid?"

"Oh, it's harmless if you know how."

"Says you. I'll bet the old man don't know you got it." Then, as the boy's eyes spread in dismay: "Don't worry, I wouldn't tell him if his life depended on it."

In a low voice Anthony said, "Thank you, Jeff."

"I told you not to thank me. I'm not doing you any favors." He turned but stopped at the door. "You don't hafta stay in your room, the old man says," he said over his shoulder. "He just wants for you to stay away from him, that's all. Better duck that knife someplace."

He went out, leaving the door open. At almost the same moment the opposite door opened and Dolph came out. He glanced inquisitively into the boy's room, then stared. He knew a Bunsen burner when he saw one and he knew what a test tube was.

He put his hands on his hips and said, "What the hell have you got now! Chemicals. Hey, Willie, come here and take a look at Desperate Dan's new playtoy."

William gave a *tch* of annoyance, but he stopped and looked into Anthony's room.

"Well, well, what is it?" he demanded peevishly.

The boy was crouched, hiding most of the set from his view.

Dolph chuckled, "First it was knives, now he's playing with chemicals. Going to blow us all up one of these nights, Desperate Dan?"

"Leave me alone," Anthony whispered.

Dolph strode across the room and snatched up one of the jars. He whistled. "Bichloride of mercury! That's a cute toy for a kid. What do you think of that, Willie? Bichloride of mercury."

William shook his head. "What's the matter with you, boy?" he asked gravely. "Why can't you be like other boys? That"—he flapped his plump hand—"is dangerous. You'll have to get rid of it."

Anthony leaped to his feet and snatched the jar from Dolph's hand. He backed away with it.

"Now you leave me alone, both of you!" His mouth was quivering. "I'm not hurting anybody with my chemistry set. I was making something for mice in the kitchen. And if you tell Grandfather on me, I'll tell him on you. I'll tell him about the jokes you were making today, Uncle Dolph. I'll tell him about how you two are always arguing about who'll be left the most in the will. Now leave me alone, won't you? Please leave me alone!"

They stared at him, then Dolph said soberly, "Sure, kid." Then he turned. "Come on, Willie. Let's go downstairs and have a drink."

As the door closed, Anthony heard William protesting, "But that kind of thing's dangerous, I tell you!"

Carefully Anthony concealed his beloved set in the depths of the closet, then, taking his scimitar, crept down the back stairs and fled into the garden. But no longer could he pretend to himself that he was the dread Saracen, Scourge of Islam. Half boy and half adult, he was lost in the dark no-man's land that fell between both worlds. There was no safety in child-

ish imaginings any more, and the savagery of grown-ups appalled him. He crept under his favorite rhododendron bush and laid his cheek against the cool leaf mold.

He heard the crunch of his grandfather's wheel chair again and closed his eyes. The crunching became faster and suddenly he heard the shrill bleat of the old man's terrified voice. He parted the branches and saw the chair coming down the path, gathering speed. The old man clung to the arms, screaming. The boy wriggled desperately clear of the bush, but by that time the chair had careened past him. Fifty feet below, the path took a turn; straight ahead was a drop of ten feet into a boulder-strewn brook.

YELLING at the top of his lungs, Anthony raced after the chair. He tripped and fell headlong. The chair hit the turn, bounded into the air and overturned. For a moment the old man was clear of it, looking oddly disjointed, then he disappeared. Before the boy could scramble to his feet, Dolph and William came pounding down the path, and behind them, Jeff.

Dolph gave Anthony an odd look and cried, "I didn't think you had it in you, Desperate Dan," and sprinted down the path.

Anthony rose slowly and limped after them. The wheel chair lay on its side in the brook, but the old man was sitting on the bank, holding his hand and whimpering. Jeff carried him up to the path. Dolph brought up the wheel chair and William fussily supervised the placing of the old man in it. The old man glowered at them.

"Well, well? What're you standing around for?" he snapped. "Somebody call the doctor. I broke my darned hand, that's what I did."

Jeff lumbered hastily up the path toward the grim house. William pushed the wheel chair. Dolph took the boy tightly by the arm.

"Come on," he said roughly. "You're coming, too."

Frightened, the boy walked docilely beside him. Everybody was so solemn and even Jeff had looked scared. They pushed him into his own room and gruffly told him to stay there. But when they were gone he opened the door and palely peered down the hall. Dolph and William were standing outside the old man's room. They had been told to get out and stay out. They were talking, arguing.

Dolph's voice rose angrily, "Okay, okay, have it your own way, but I know what I saw. Jeff said he left the brake on, didn't he? For the love of Pete, Willie, the chair was standing out there for an hour. Then all of a sudden it's running down the hill, and the kid's there, too. What else is there to think?"

William said worriedly, "But you didn't actually *see* him do it."

"I didn't have to see him. He did it!"

"But I still think you'd better talk to the old gentleman before you make any accusations. After all, he was in the wheel chair and he'd know."

"Nuts. He was asleep. Willie, that kid's a menace . . ."

Sick, Anthony closed his door. "I didn't, I didn't!" he whispered. He looked around the room, then crept into the closet and closed the door. He was still there an hour later, sitting hunched in the darkness, when William came for him.

William said shortly, "Your grandfather wants to see you." He looked severe and pushed the boy down the hall ahead of him.

The old man was sitting up in bed, his right hand in bandages and splints. Talking to him was a tall, dry-looking man. Dolph stood scowling with his back to the window and Jeff was at the opposite side of the room, chewing his fingernails. The old man's head jerked up when Anthony entered.

"This is the boy, Ogilvie," he said to the tall man. "Boy, this is Mr. Ogilvie. He's an attorney. Do you

know what an attorney is?"

Anthony whispered, "Yes."

"You don't like me, do you, boy?"

Anthony shook his head.

"Well," the old man said drily, "it's mutual. But all the same, I'm a fair man. I made a new will. Know what a will is, boy?"

Anthony glanced from William to Dolph and nodded.

The old man gave a short, barking laugh. "Ha! I imagine you've gotten a liberal education in wills, hey? Well, I've left you a third of my money in mine. Maybe it should be half, but we'll let it stand that way for the time being. Well, what's the matter, boy? Lost your tongue?"

THE old man did not wait for an answer, but plunged on querulously. "After all I've done for everybody, this misshapen little brat here is the only one who darn near broke his neck trying to save mine. Isn't that a fact, boy?"

"N-no, sir," Anthony whispered, cowed a little by the clinical glance of the attorney. "I just cut my knee a little, that's all." He took a deep breath and rushed on recklessly, "Please, if you want to do something, send me away. I don't like it here. I don't want to be left anything in your will. I just want to go away, that's all."

The old man's face purpled. He lunged forward in bed. "Get back to your room!" he shouted. "Get out of here. I don't care if you like it here or not, you're staying!"

Anthony darted for the door. Ogilvie said crisply to the old man, "You're making a fool of yourself as usual," and followed the boy out of the room. Out in the hall, he took Anthony's arm and gave him a funny, dry little smile that looked as if it hadn't had much practice.

"Come downstairs, young man. We'll have a litle glass of wine. I think you're old enough for that. I want to ask a favor of you."

They went into the cavernous old dining room—the "eerie, shadowed dining room" of the murder stories that came later in the newspapers.

Ogilvie poured Anthony a thimbleful of wine. His manner was stiff but kind. He wasn't accustomed to boys and he seemed embarrassed.

"I—want to tell you a few things, Anthony. Old men, like your grandfather, think too much about dying. They attach a lot of importance to it. You don't, do you?"

Anthony stammered, "I—I never thought about it, sir."

"That's exactly what I mean. Well, your grandfather sometimes becomes annoyed when others don't attach the same importance to his dying that he does. He feels lonely and frightened."

Bewildered, Anthony said, "He does?" He could not imagine his grandfather feeling like that—he felt like that himself—but he knew it must be so if Mr. Ogilvie said it was so. Mr. Ogilvie did not look like a man who would lie.

"Now, here's the favor I want to ask of you, Anthony," Ogilvie said gravely. "Be kind to your grandfather." He smiled as Anthony's eyes spread wide. "Yes, your grandfather needs kindness. He needs a good kick in the pants, too. But I'm going to tell you something, Anthony, and I know you'll understand me. Old men, like your grandfather, are not much different from babies. You wouldn't be mean to a baby, no matter how much it cried, would you? It'll be hard with your grandfather. I know. But you'll try, won't you?"

For a long while Anthony stood in silence, staring down into the thin claret he had not tasted. He wanted to make all sorts of conditions—he wanted to be permitted to keep his scimitar, to play with his chemistry set out in the open—but somehow he knew that this was one time he could not bargain.

"I'll try," he said with difficulty.

"But you won't like it?"

"No, sir," he said quickly.

"But you *will* try."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you want to shake hands on that, Anthony?"

The attorney's hand was dry, brittle and pleasant. Ogilvie rolled his eyes at the ceiling and gave Anthony that funny, dry little smile again.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I'll have to go up and humor him for a while."

Left alone, Anthony felt inexplicably terrified. His mind was a jumble, and he did not even half realize what Ogilvie had been hinting at, though not daring to put into words—that someone had tried to kill his grandfather. Jeff had left the brake on the wheel chair, and it was not a brake that would work itself loose. It had to be deliberately released. It was not as clear as that in Anthony's mind. All that he knew positively was that the room seemed suddenly smaller and the shadows darker.

He had never been so grateful to crawl into bed as he was that evening. He was always glad to go to bed, in the silent darkness, but that night he was especially glad. He pulled the blanket over his head and curled up, soon losing himself in the dreams that had always been his best refuge.

HE RESISTED awakening even when the rough hand jerked him upright, and he was straining back toward his pillow when the chopping fist caught him across the back of the neck. He sagged limply. He was not entirely stunned, but nightmarishly semi-conscious.

It seemed to him that he was lifted to the height of the angry clouds and whirled through the air with rocket speed. A scream locked frozen in his chest. He heard, rather than felt, the second blow on the back of his neck. It sounded like the thump on a soggy drum. He was pushed into the front seat of a sedan, but he didn't know it was an automobile—it was a wild horse in flaming armor, plunging into the weird horror of ghastly battle. His terror was so tangible that he could taste it and, in this nightmare, see it and hear it.

He was never allowed fully to recover consciousness. Each time he stirred, another blow on the back of the neck sent his mind crazily reeling.

The car stopped and he was jerked out of the seat. Something brushed his ear and, horribly, began to speak to him. It was as if the whole world had turned into a pair of lips.

"Can you hear me can you hear me can you hear me?"

The whisper was as thin as a needle in his brain. Desperately he tried to nod his lolling head.

"The lights straight ahead is the railroad station. Keep going. Don't come back. Here." Something was thrust into his hand and his fingers folded around it. "Money. Don't lose it."

Another tap on the back of the neck sent him to his knees. Slowly he toppled over on his side, laying his cheek on the rough grass.

Railroad station. Keep going. Money.

He wanted to sleep. He wanted to lie there forever. But gradually his mind was clearing. Dizzily he sat up. He saw the lights of the station ahead, but all else was darkness. He was dressed. He did not remember having dressed.

There was something heavy in his jacket pocket, and when he took it out he saw it was his dime bank, circular, a half inch thick, flat. And there was something in his hand. He could not see it, but he could feel it—paper money. Money for a railroad ticket. *Keep going. Don't come back.*

Yesterday it would have been easy. Yesterday he'd had every reason to go and never come back. But now he had talked to Mr. Ogilvie, and Mr. Ogilvie had asked him a favor. He sensed that Mr. Ogilvie would be a friend. He had never had a friend. Anthony pushed himself to his feet. He turned away from the railroad station. He wasn't going back because

of his grandfather, but because he did not want Mr. Ogilvie to be mad at him.

The road was strange to him. He had never been allowed very far from the grim, blood-red house, and he knew nothing of the country around. He walked until a hard sliver of gray cracked the eastern sky, then he curled up on the soft, fragrant needles under a pine tree and fell into exhausted sleep.

The sun was not very high when he awakened. His head ached dully from the blows he had been given, but doggedly he brushed himself off and started down the macadam road. This must have been a back road, for there was little traffic and no houses. The few cars that did come whizzed by and he was too timid to try to hitch-hike. He watched them wistfully, then plodded on.

The fifth car whizzed by, then suddenly braked. He ran toward it, stood smiling uncertainly at the window. There were two state troopers inside. They looked carefully at him and finally one said:

"That's the kid, all right. They said he was funny-looking."

"I—I'm Anthony," he offered humbly.

"Sure you are. Get in, kid. We'll take you back to the house."

THERE were more policemen at the house. His Uncle William was in the sepulchral hall when they entered, and he stared at the boy with horror. He strode after the troopers as they hustled the bewildered boy into the gloomy library. Uncle Dolph was there, too, and Jeff, and they looked at him so queerly that the boy was frightened anew.

There were other police there, also, and a dark, fierce-looking man they called Lieutenant Ryan. The house, though standing alone on this somber hill, was still within the city limits.

Ryan looked at the boy for a moment, measuring him, deciding which approach would get the most from him.

"Son," he said quietly, "they tell me you didn't like your grandfather. Is that a fact?"

Anthony whispered, "Yes, sir."

"Did you push your grandfather's wheel chair down that hill yesterday? In fun, that is. As a sort of joke."

"I didn't! Uncle Dolph tried to say I did, but I didn't!"

William said pompously, "As no one actually saw the boy start the chair, there is no direct evidence to support that accusation."

Ryan said drily, "Thanks." He turned back to the boy. "You didn't threaten your grandfather with a knife either, did you?"

Jeff snorted and said, "Aw, hell!"

Ryan silenced Jeff with a look. Then the lieutenant stepped away from the desk, and with a guilty start Anthony saw his chemistry set spread on the top of it.

"This is your chemistry set, isn't it, son?" Ryan asked pleasantly.

For a wild moment Anthony was going to deny it. For all he knew, it was against the law to have some of the things he had. Maybe that was the reason for the police.

"It's—mine," he said in despair.

Ryan lifted a jar. "And what's in this one, son?"

Anthony leaned forward. "Th-that's from the gardener's shack," he quavered. "I—I guess I kind of stole it."

But the lieutenant kept smiling. "You know what it is, don't you?"

"Y-yes, sir. It's arsenic. It's for mice."

"It makes people sick, too. Did you know that?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Now, I want you to tell me something, Anthony. You know where your grandfather's special milk is in the kitchen, don't you? Fine. I knew you did. Now, Anthony, didn't you put just a little of this in that milk bottle to—well, get even with your grandfather because he was mean to

you? You just wanted to make him sick, didn't you?"

Anthony cried, *"No, sir!* Tha-that *kills* people!"

The door opened and a state trooper crossed the room and whispered something in Ryan's ear. The detective nodded and followed the trooper out of the room. A few minutes later the trooper came back and took Anthony by the hand. He gave the boy a reassuring grin. Anthony's hand was like ice.

In the hall Mr. Ogilvie was talking earnestly with the lieutenant, but when Anthony appeared he broke off and put out his hand and gave the boy that same funny, dry little smile.

"I was just telling Lieutenant Ryan about the favor you were going to do for me," he said. "But you ran away, Anthony. Why did you run away?"

"I didn't run away, Mr. Ogilvie. I—somebody took me away and told me not to come back. He told me to go on the railroad. He gave me money. See?" he dug in his pocket and brought out a crumpled roll of one-dollar bills. There were eight of them. "And he put my bank in my pocket. There's three dollars and forty cents in it."

"You see?" Ogilvie said significantly to Ryan. "Now, Anthony, tell us exactly what did happen."

Anthony told them — about the blows on the back of the neck, about how he thought he was being taken away on a wild horse into noisy battle, about his decision to come back so Mr. Ogilvie wouldn't be mad.

Ryan stood snapping his fingers and scowling. "I'm beginning to see a little crack of daylight," he growled. "The louse wasn't very generous with the money he gave the boy, was he? Hey, you"—he beckoned to the trooper—"go to the garage and check the cars of those three birds in there. I want to know which one of them is noisy. I think the noise of the car gave the boy the impression the horse had armor on it."

Ogilvie nodded in agreement.

"And I got a couple other ideas, too," Ryan went on. He seemed angry. He ran his hand over Anthony's hair and tugged gently at his ear. "We're going back in there, son, and no matter what I ask you, I want you to agree with me, even if you know it's wrong. Okay?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Okay, let's hope it works."

THEY went back into the room. Ryan stood by the desk again and put his fists on his hips. "We're going to run a test," he barked. "You've all heard of the paraffin test for gunpowder stains on the hand. We've got some others just like it. The one we're going to run is the one for arsenic." He picked up a jar from the desk and looked at Anthony. "This is acetate of copper, isn't it, son?"

It wasn't, but Anthony nodded dumbly.

"Combined with arsenic, it turns green. Right?"

Anthony said, "Yes, sir." It was right.

"Okay," said Ryan grimly. "Now we'll find out who handled the arsenic. Give me your hands first, son."

Anthony held out his hands and Ryan swabbed his fingers with the liquid from the jar. It was acetone and it had a harsh odor.

"It will work in about five seconds," Ryan said.

The silence grew heavy. Someone sucked in his breath when the boy's hands remained unstained. Ryan turned to Dolph.

"You're next," he snapped.

Dolph's hands trembled as he brought them up. "But suppose I handled anything with arsenic, like rat poison," he stammered.

"You'll turn green," said Ryan unsympathetically.

Dolph was already green. He licked the moisture from his lip as Ryan swabbed his hands with the acetone. He stared with dread at his fingers as the five seconds ticked relentlessly by.

Nothing happened. Dolph collapsed into the chair.

"Okay. Now you." Ryan flipped his hand at Jeff. "And you can wipe that grin off your face. No matter how much you washed your hands, it'll still show. Your hands'll be freckled with it."

Jeff grunted, "You scare me. Come on, get it over."

He brought up his hands—then suddenly snapped his right into a short hook for Ryan's jaw. Ryan ducked and dove into Jeff with both fists digging savagely into the mid-section. He brought up a right to Jeff's jaw and followed with a smashing left. He drove Jeff across the room, nailed him against the wall and hammered the big man until his face was a mask of blood.

"That's for trying to frame a kid," Ryan snarled, still punching. "This is for those rabbit punches you gave him."

Jeff was out on his feet, but Ryan held him against the wall and battered his face. When he stepped away, panting, Jeff fell straight forward on what was left of his bloody features.

"And for a lousy five thousand bucks," said Ryan, looking down at Jeff in disgust. "Wanted to start a health farm, eh? Well, brother, where you're going, you won't have to worry about health. Come on, son." He took Anthony's hand. "Let's get out of here. The boys'll take care of him."

Ogilvie went out with them. They walked slowly out to the porch and Anthony was surprised to see that the sun was shining. It didn't seem right. It should have been dark. Ryan stared out across the hill and made a face.

"I suppose," he growled, "those high-class uncles will be taking the boy over now, and that should be just dandy."

Ogilvie gave a dry little cough.

"In my modest way," he murmured, "I can make myself very unpleasant if they try. Anthony's grandfather happens to have made me the boy's guardian. I hope you don't mind, do you, Anthony?"

Anthony looked up. He had no words. He had only those startlingly large, happy eyes.

Copper on Crutches

By Dan Gordon

(Continued from page 64)

ble. As his head came down on a level with Ben's, Ben slapped sideways with the weapon and felt the satisfying thud of metal striking bone.

Ben grunted, "Something he missed in law school. Something he didn't learn."

The chief of detectives lay still.

It was later, much later, and Ben Bradley, still a detective, was talking to Eva Kline across the counter of the café. From the kitchen in the rear, Stover's face poked in, then withdrew as he quietly closed the door.

The girl was saying, "And when it's all tidied up, you'll be a coming man on the force. You won't want the stigma attached to marrying the daughter of an ex-convict."

Ben Bradley said around a mouthful of steak, "Eva, if you got stigma, stigma is what I need."

She had the look that people have when they're happy, and went to get his dessert.

Invitation to the Morgue

By Louis J. Clark

It was an unexpected, fear-filled meeting—when the doomed man faced his betrayer with only his wily brain to match against killer bullets.



THE two old women looked up as the revolving door of the Carleton Arms swung around and a large figure trailing cigar smoke strode into the lobby. Kicking aside brushes and soap as he walked over the marble tiles, the big man left his footprints on the still damp floor. Before reaching the elevator he removed the cigar from his mouth and with a twisted grin flicked the ashes around him. One of the women started to rise in protest but the other tugged at her dress.

"Don't say anything, Maggie," she warned. "Keep quiet."

The big man looked at the women for a long moment, then, with a mirthless chuckle, stepped into the waiting elevator.

"Had a good night at the club, Mr. Simmons?" The operator smiled ingratiatingly. You could never tell about Big Bill Simmons. Maybe this was one of his good nights. Sometimes he tossed money around like one of the suckers down at his Melody Club. But you might get a backhander for just looking at him.

The big man remained silent, puffing his cigar and blowing wreaths of smoke toward the NO SMOKING sign in the elevator cab.

As the car jerked to a stop, he crumpled up a bill and tossed it on the floor. "Here's a fin, kid," he growled. "Buy yourself a good used car."

The operator squirmed with gratitude. "Thank you, sir; thank you very much."

Inside the apartment, Big Bill threw his coat on a divan and walked into the study where every night, religiously, he went over his accounts. There were bookkeepers at the club to do the work, but Bill trusted no one where money was concerned. Everyone was out to make a buck. The suckers worked for it; the wise guys took it from the suckers. And he, Big Bill Simmons, was a sucker for no one.

He sat at the ornate period desk and switched on the light.

"Big operator now, ain't you, Bill?" The sneering voice seemed to come from the reaches of the room.

Big Bill stared wildly out into the semi-darkness of the study. For a moment he sat as one paralyzed; then, with a swift, catlike motion, his right hand opened a desk drawer.

A slight, gray-faced man materialized from the shadows. He stood not ten feet from the desk, grim, tight-lipped, his right hand clutched ominously in an overcoat pocket.

"You make another move for that drawer," he threatened, "and I'll give it to you. Put both of your hands back on the desk where I can see them."

Big Bill's voice was suddenly conciliatory. "I didn't know you were back in town, Marty. If I had . . ."

"If you had, you'd have given me another trip. Well, I'm back, Bill. I've

been waiting a long time for this."

"Look, Marty," Bill protested, "somebody's been giving you a bum steer. You got no need to come here with a gun. I didn't have anything to do with the deal you got. Give me a chance, Marty, and I'll prove it."

A CRACKED toneless laugh broke in. "Remember your boy, Watson?" the little man asked. "He was up there with me and we got real friendly. He died over a year ago, Bill, and before he went he had time to tell me a lot of things. He told me how you put that frame around me and handed me over to the D.A."

Marty's voice broke to a whisper. He went on slowly, one word following another as if a great effort was required to force them out. "And he told me about Flo. He told me how my wife found herself a new playmate as soon as I was safe on the train."

Beads of perspiration dotted the brow of the big man. He had almost forgotten about Flo. It had been so long ago. He remembered now how he had fallen for her. She had been one of the reasons he had given Marty over to the cops when Hennessey had been killed at the club.

"Look, Marty," Big Bill said, "suppose I did get out of line then. That's gone by. You're out of the can now and I'll square it for you. I got the dough, Marty."

"Keep talking," the little man said. "Keep talking. Tell me about Flo, Bill. What happened to her when you finished with her?"

Big Bill watched Marty narrowly. Would he have the guts to shoot, he wondered. His thoughts flew back to the old days. Marty was a standing joke at the club. He never carried a gun. Even admitted he was afraid of them. The boys used to flash a rod occasionally just to see him shake and run for cover. But being up there for so long could make a difference in a man. If only he had had time to get to his gun before Marty had gotten too close. If only—

"Tell me about Flo, Bill, that's one thing I want to know about. Get talking!" The voice suddenly became shrill and the little man's hands made a perceptible movement in the pocket.

Big Bill felt his lips twitch and his hands pressed harder on the desk to prevent them from shaking.

"Marty, I didn't have anything to do with her. I know what you heard, but it ain't the truth. She maybe thought she was interested in me for a while and then she went off somewhere. I never heard from her again. I ain't kidding you, Marty. You believe that, don't you?" The big man's voice took on an imploring note.

Marty spat. "Go ahead, crawl some more."

For an agonizing moment the two faced each other wordlessly. Big Bill broke the silence. His voice was a whisper.

"What are you going to do? You can't shoot me like this?"

"I got a gun in here with a full clip. What do you think?"

The big man no longer attempted to conceal his fright. His voice shook as his hands did a macabre dance on the polished surface of the desk.

"Marty," he pleaded, "don't do it. I'll do anything you want. I'll even give you a cut in the club. What about it?"

"Maybe you'll give me back Flo and all those years I spent up there?"

Words began to tumble from the big man's quivering mouth. "Marty, please give me a chance. I'll go to the D.A. I'll tell him I killed Hennessey. I'll put you in the clear. I'll do anything, Marty, anything."

"Get up on your feet." The little man backed away from the desk, his hand in the coat pocket seemed to be lifting, pointing at the cowering hulk behind the desk.

BIG BILL rose slowly to his feet, his hands still gripping the top of the desk. In a flash, with the speed born of desperation, his right hand went for the drawer. Shot after shot

echoed and re-echoed in the heavily curtained room.

How long he stood there squeezing the trigger of an empty gun, Big Bill never knew. It was only when he became aware of figures standing in the entrance to the apartment that he dropped the gun and slumped back into the large chair behind the desk.

Voices seemed to be talking to him as from a great distance, but he knew the men were standing beside him.

"So you killed the little guy, Simmons?"

Big Bill looked up at the stocky figure bending over him. Gradually the mental numbness wore off and the sharp faculties which had served him so well in the past asserted themselves.

"So it's you, Murdoch," he growled. "That's Marty Harris, remember him? He got into the apartment before I came back from the club tonight. He had a gun on me for almost an hour and when he started to shoot I let him have it."

Lieutenant Murdoch merely grunted. "Keep talking."

"He made me stand up and said he was going to shoot. When I was getting up I grabbed for my gun—yeah, I got a permit. . . . Well, that's all. I got to my gun before he could fire."

A form bending over the body of Marty looked up. "That's a good story he's got, lieutenant. Ask him how this guy was going to shoot him without a gun."

Big Bill stiffened. "What are you guys trying to pull? He told me he had a gun. He—"

Murdoch nodded seriously. "Yeah, I know. The little guy comes in and tells you he's got a gun and you believe him. That your story?"

"Sure that's my story. That's what happened. Only he was here when I got back tonight. I told you that."

"I heard you." For a moment Murdoch looked at Big Bill, a thin smile crinkling the edges of his mouth. "Tell that to a jury, Simmons, don't give it to me. Remember me, I knew you back when. I know this punk on the floor, too. The little guy was afraid of his shadow. And you try to tell me he was up here threatening to kill you without a gun. How was he going to do it, with his bare hands? Get your coat, we're going downtown."

Big Bill stared at the inert form sprawled grotesquely on the rug in front of his desk. He stood as if in a stupor, frightened, bewildered, vainly trying to understand what had happened to him.

"Come along, get going," Murdoch ordered.

Big Bill started for the door. Suddenly he stopped and turned to the detective. "Tell me something, Murdoch, how's it happen you were here tonight?"

Murdoch grinned. "Now that's a funny thing, Simmons. We got a phone call tonight from Marty. He told us that you had found he was out on parole and that you wanted to see him up here. He must have made a mistake about the time because you got him before we were supposed to show up. He was afraid you'd do something like this to him."

The big man's feet dragged as he walked to the foyer. His large hands passed nervously over his forehead. "Why did he do it?" he muttered. "Why? He acted like he had a gun. And he wasn't afraid of me. There must have been a reason. There must have been."

Murdoch threw him his hat and coat. "Let's get going."

As they entered the elevator, the operator looked at Big Bill. "I hope they burn you, you louse," he sneered.

Murdoch took out a cigarette and carefully lighted it. As he blew the smoke ceilingward he turned to Big Bill.

"Want to hear something funny, Simmons?" he asked. "This'll kill you. You really didn't need to have plugged the little monkey up there tonight. He wouldn't have been around much longer to bother you anyway."

The lieutenant took another long

drag before finishing. "The Governor gave him a pardon on the recommendation of the prison doctors. They said he had only a few weeks more to live. An incurable disease they couldn't do anything about. So you see, Simmons, you wasted all those bullets. You should have waited."

Big Bill stared at the detective with unbelieving eyes. The officer held him up as he seemed about to fall. "Then he wanted me to kill him," the big man gasped. "He *wanted* me to. That dirty no-good punk. That—"

Murdoch laughed as he pushed the stumbling figure out of the elevator into the freshly washed lobby of the Carleton Arms.



Conclave With Corpses

By Carl Memling

(*Continued from page* 45)

ole. They jangled for a moment, then lay still.

The knife dropped another inch.

Harry Barlow tapped his fingers nervously on the table's edge. "You write the ticket," he said flatly.

The young man glanced at his watch. "You better think fast on a way to get me out of here."

The old actor tottered along the wall. His eyes were bulging now, held by the knife's gleam as moths are by a flame. His mouth was half open and he kept breathing heavily, long swishing breaths, like a fish out of water.

Harry Barlow bunched his lips together and began kneading his forehead with his hand. He began thinking.

Then Mrs. Parkington moaned. Her eyes were still closed and she writhed like a rhinoceros on its back in the sun, making soft purring sounds.

"John," she said. "John—"

She tried to open her eyes but was blinded by the light. A happy smile spread across her round face. "John," she whispered. "John . . ."

And as her tremendous arms reached up and began pulling the surprised young man down to her side, Harry Barlow lunged forward and smacked the knife out of his hands.

It was the next day now, and Harry Barlow was apologizing to Mrs. Parkington. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I wanted to convince him that everything was on the up-and-up—that's why I went through that *husband* routine. At least now you'll get your jewels back."

Mrs. Parkington looked at him soulfully. "The way you were made up," she said. "And your voice. You have a wonderful voice. It thrilled me through and through"

Harry Barlow smiled blandly, nodded, then his face writhed in a grimace of shock. "Please," he said, "*don't* say that again!"

Man's Best Fiend



"Alvin Hinkey" Yarn

By Joe Archibald

Hambone Noonan and Alvin Hinkey, that Gotham homicide team built for laughs, learn that sometimes cadavers and canines go together. For what a bullet is to a corpse, so a bone is to a pooch. Maybe this doesn't make sense, but neither do Hambone and Alvin.

SHAKE-UPS occur in the best police departments and so one fine morning me and Hambone Noonan find ourselves in a precinct house far up in the Bronx, and little more than a stone's throw from Woodlawn's bone orchard. When we bade the D.A. good-by downtown, he expressed his regret that Siberia was not a part of Manhattan.

Now Hambone, sitting near me in a room that is for the exclusive use of detectives, and is growling like a St. Bernard that has discovered there is nothing stronger in the keg hanging from his collar than root beer.

"What's eatin' you, Hambone?" I ask pleasantly. "Didn't you like the show last night even if the dame bought the tickets?"

"I should of known, Alvin. Any babe that takes you somewheres for free should be investigated first," Noonan says bitterly. "She took me to the dog show at Grand Central Palace. I been scratchin' myself ever since."

"Why dogs are very interestin'," I says. "They are much smarter than some citizens I know."

"People are suckers," Hambone opines. "The dame points out a police dog an' it does not even have flat feet."

"An' the French poodle was a fake because it didn't have an accent,

huh?" I sniff at the knucklehead. "Did you eat after the show?"

"Yeah, hot dogs at Hedick's," Hambone snarls. "I been barkin' at everybody ever sincet. Leave us change the subject, Alvin, an' finish the gin game we started yesterday aft."

Hambone is dealing the pasteboards when a very lumpy character bursts in upon us who is none other than a captain of detectives named Xavier Moriarty, better known about the Bronx as Moose Nose. Moriarty lives with an ulcer and a sister-in-law, and he has a disposition as bright and cheerful as a jackal souped up with reefers.

"Oh, don't leave me interrupt you hot shots," Moose Nose sneers. "Not even for a murder! Pahdon the intrusiveness. Grab your hats, you dime store dicks, 'fore you ain't got no heads to keep warm!"

"I see no reason for such distemper," Noonan says. "Come on, Alvin, an' we will show these rubes up here how to detect criminals."

"That I gotta see," Moose Nose snarls. "Noonan, you don't look like you could find a tea bag in Ceylon. Awright, shake your rompers as corpses don't keep."

WE GET out of the department jalopy in front of a big old-fashioned house just off Katonah Avenue. It has a lawn near it big enough to accommodate a fight arena and it is shaded by very old trees. A big cop nods to Moose Nose as we walk into the front hall, then ogles Hambone.

"Why," he says, "bless me soul if it ain't Noonan. Just what have you got on the police commissioner, stupid? Well, we kin use a laugh here."

"A comic, Alvin," Hambone sniffs. "Like an orphan strangler."

We go into the living room and there is the remains of one Fillmore Gooch sprawled out on a divan. He is quite a sartorial picture except for the bullet hole in his bosom where a shirt button should have been. An employee of the city, whose business it is to be acquainted with rigor mortis and its causes, sighs deeply and leaves the cadaver's side.

"Mr. Gooch was murdered sometime between ten last night and seven this morning," he announces. "He was shot by a weapon of thirty-eight calibre. I shall give you an authorization to remove the body."

"Who discovered the stiff?" Moriarty asks.

"The housekeeper," a cop says. "She lives here but it was her night off last night. She is in the kitchen scairt out of her camisole."

"Bring her in," Moose Nose says. "Noonan, you and Hinkey look around for a gun, but don't you touch nothin'!"

"Whicht is a good trick if it's hid somewheres," I snaps. "I thought workin' with Noonan was bad. but you . . ."

They bring in the housekeeper whose name is Mrs. Miffen. She is a gaunt old babe who does not remind me of nobody's mother and has eyes as shifty as a Notre Dame halfback's legs. Moriarty asks her if she knew of anybody who'd want to kill Fillmore Gooch.

"Me fer one," Mrs. Miffen says. "I wisht I knew who beat me to it! He drove out his poor wife, the lowdown snook!"

"Hm," Hambone says. "Number One suspect."

"Shuddup!" Moose Nose says. "Didn't he have no friends?"

"Not unless it was blondes—or maybe Buford Tansy who come here once in a while to play chess with him," Mrs. Miffen nasals. "Tansy looks just like his name and works for the Gooch Garter Company. If he had a twin, you'd wonder which one had the Toni."

Me and Hambone laugh but Moriarty says he can't see nothing funny about murder and to let's not ham it up. Soon a cop comes in and hands him a special delivery letter.

Moose Nose says after a quick gander at it, "What in aitch goes on

here? It is from the warden's office at Sing Sing. Cops, I opened it without thinkin'."

"A natural mistake for you," I says. "The FBI would not like that."

"Listen, boys. It looks like the case is solved awready," Moriarty says, and he reads aloud. " 'Dear Mr. Gooch. Because of pressing matters I delayed informing you about the release from Sing Sing of one Augie Glotz the day before yesterday. I hope this oversight has not inconvenienced you in any way. Yours very truly, etc., etc.' "

"Bein' dead ain't convenient," Hambone says. "Who knows about Glotz?"

"I remember," Mrs. Miffen says. "He stole money while working for Gooch and claimed it was for an operation for his poor mother. But Gooch let him have the works and he got two to five. He swore he'd fix Gooch's wagon as soon as he got out."

"We'll throw out the dragnet for Mr. Augie Glotz," Moriarty says. "No use to dust for no more prints, boys, or snap no more photos. We'll have an arrest inside twenty-four hours, you can tell the reporters out there."

"I just thought of something," Mrs. Miffen says. "Dear me. While I was dusting Mr. Gooch's desk in the den I happened to—let me get it. I'll be right back."

"Oh, yeah?" Hambone says. "Leave me stick with the old babe, Moriarty. Maybe she wants to lam."

"Yeah, keep everybody under surveyance every second, Noonan," Moose Nose says.

"Oh, brother!" I sigh.

A FEW moments later Mrs. Miffen comes back into the room and she hands Moriarty another letter. The paper is the color of an apricot.

"It came about three weeks ago," the old doll sniffs.

" 'Dear Mr. Gooch,' " Moose Nose recites, " 'if you think for one moment you can throw Carmencita Del Monico aside like an old garter, you are very much mistaken, Señor. You will be a very sorry caballero if you continue to give me—as you Americans say—the brush-off. You promised to divorce your wife and marry me and now I hear it will be a blonde. Want to bet, Señor?' "

Moriarty sits down and paws his face with his hands. "Oh, no!" he groans.

"Them dames never forget," Hambone says.

"Shuddup!" Moriarty yelps, and then there is a loud roar of terror out in the hall followed by a scratching sound at the door that is not made by a kitten.

Mrs. Miffen hops up from her chair like a slice of bread out of a toaster. "Everybody stay where you are!" she squawks. "Tiny must have got loose!"

Mrs. Miffen goes to the door and opens it and reaches down quick and grabs by the collar a bulldog with a head bigger than Hambone's. I never saw a homelier face even on a pooch. The old babe shuts the door behind her and we listen to her coax and drag the canine to the back of the house. I go to the door, open it a crack, and look out. A cop is getting down off the chandelier in the hall and another is halfway inside a grandfather's clock.

"It's all right now, boys," Mrs. Miffen says, and I step back and let her into the room. "Tiny must've broke his chain last night sometime. Only me and Mr. and Mrs. Gooch can handle him."

"Then the neighbors must've heard that rock crusher barkin' last night," Moriarty yelps. "It would fix the exact time of the rubout."

"Oh, he never barks," Mrs. Miffen says. "That's why he bites so much, I guess. You know the old saying, a barking dog . . ."

Moriarty paws his face again. His cigar is quite a mess and hangs from his mouth like a wet bar-rag.

"Then if the pooch was loose last night he might've bit a hunk out of the criminal!" I says fast, trying to help.

"It could be—if he broke his chain before the murder," Mrs. Miffen says.

"Well, you cops have got suspects enough to work on, it seems to me. What are you cops waiting for? I ain't going to serve no refreshments."

"Yeah," Moose Nose Moriarty says. "I'm goin' to quiz Mrs. Gooch. You and Hinkey, Noonan, go after Augie Glotz. Then if none of them did it, we'll pinch the Spanish cupcake."

"Humph, you want all the cheesecake to yourself, huh?" I says to Moriarty. "Augie might be trigger-happy."

"Hinkey, that is unsubordination!" Moriarty howls. "I have a good mind—"

"You don't even have a mind," I says. "Come on, Hambone.

After an hour of clever police work, me and Hambone find out that Augie Glotz has a sister living on West 137th Street and we are at the address shortly before noon. She is a corpulent housewife with four kids hanging onto her skirt. "Augie?" she asks. "Don't tell me he's got himself in a sling already? No, he don't live with me as I only have three rooms here, a mother-in-law, an aunt and six kids. Augie got himself a room over a tavern on 135th. It's called Frankie and Johnny's Bar."

We go there. Augie himself opens the door we rap on. He looks quite pained about something besides the intrusion.

"Don't tell me," Augie snaps. "You are cops."

"Now how could you tell?" I ask, looking down at Hambone's feet. "Augie, let's have straight answers so's we don't have to take you downtown. Where was you last night?"

"Okay, I'll come right out with it, flatfoot!" Augie says. He is a stumpy citizen with buck teeth and too much ears. "I was over at a house owned by a punk named Gooch. I went there to give him a going-over, that's what!"

"For Heaven's sake, Alvin," Noonan gasps. "He don't deny it. What did you do with the gun, Augie?"

"Gun? Listen, Fatso, he wasn't goin' to die that quick," Augie fires back. "I was goin' to do it with my bare hands! The next time—"

I exchange very surprised looks with Hambone Noonan. "Haven't you heard, Augie? Somebody shot Gooch last night an' he's now in a mortician's," I says.

"No?" Augie gulps.

"Okay, so you're quite an actor," Hambone says. "We'd better take him in, Alvin."

"You got ants?" I ask Augie who is squirming in his chair.

"Look, I been to a doctor," the ex-con yelps. "That dog of Gooch's caught up with me when I was almost to the house. It got the seat of the pants they give me when I was sprung from stir. I only got a shot fer hyderphobia an hour ago. Look, is there sign of foam on my mouth?"

I HAVE to sit down. Wheels inside of wheels spin around in my dome. It seems to me that Augie Glotz was saved from a hot seat by a weak link in a pooch's chain.

"Hambone," I says. "I am quite sure Augie is leveling."

"Sure I am," Augie says. "Gooch got rubbed out, huh? And to think if that dog had been tied up— Get a bottle out of the dresser drawer, pal. I need a hooker!"

"It means, Hambone," I says, "that dog maybe knew and liked the character that plugged Gooch. What time was it that you went there, Augie?"

"Between nine an' ten P.M., flatfoot." Augie tilts the bottle and lets it pour down his throat.

"Whicht would you rather have, Augie?" Hambone asks. "Hyderphobia or delirium tremens?"

"We'd better go back an' see Moriarty," I says. "Thanks for everything, Augie."

"Ugh," the ex-con shudders. "You should see that pooch, pals. It comes at me an' didn't make a sound. At first I thought it wash a buffalo escaped from the zoo."

When we arrived at the precinct

house, we learn that a dame is closeted with Moriarty.

"A nifty-lookin' number," a cop says. "Tsk-tsk. She is the maid for Mrs. Fillmore Gooch. Moriarty called the widow's apartment but found out Mrs. Gooch went downtown shoppin' and so reported the rubout to the maid and asked where he could get in touch with her boss. What does the maid do but ask right away can she come here and tell something she knows."

"It is some merry-go-round," I says.

"Wait until you see the trick," the cops says. "I wisht I hadn't. Tonight I'll go home an' snap at my wife."

The doll prances out of Moriarty's office a few minutes later and Hambone whistles and puts the wrong end of a cigar into his kisser. I know how it feels right then to get radioactivated and I tingle all over like I am full of sleigh bells. She has long dark hair and big eyes and wears a short mink coat, and at the moment I could have shot the character who thought up the new look.

Finally Hambone can talk. "Some maid, Alvin," he says. "If those weren't diamonds in her ears, I have a case of stigmatism. An' a mink coat!"

"Let's go in and see Moose Nose," I says.

The captain of flatfeet is sitting in his chair looking as satisfied as if he had come up with the mystery ballad of the month and had won the whole General Electric. He nods patronizingly and clears his throat.

"Yeah, you didn't have no luck with Augie, boys," Moriarty says. "So what? I am goin' to pick up the murderer before sundown. We was right the first time as it was Mrs. Gooch. Her maid said it was her duty to come to the cops and tell everything she knew. Mrs. Gooch was in love with her husband even though she walked out on him, and one day when she was quite hysterical she told the maid she would go to see Gooch and threaten to kill herself at his feet if he didn't take her back."

"Of course," Noonan says. "The pooch wouldn't bother her even if he was loose. All the time I was pretty sure it was Mrs. Gooch. They got to git up early to git ahead of you, boss."

"Git off your knees, Noonan," I sniff with disgust. "One thing I wisht you'd explain, Moose Nose—er—Moriarty. How come a maid wears mink and diamonds?"

"I asked her that, Hinkey. She gives me a look that would melt a used car dealer's heart and says her private life was nobody's business," Moriarty says. "If you could buy mink and sparklers for the likes of her and she'd let you, would you?"

"A good question," I admit. "Did the maid produce the gun that rubbed Mr. Gooch out?"

"No, but we'll get it," Moriarty snaps. "We're goin' to grab her in just about a couple of hours, Hinkey. Does a dame threaten to blow her brains out at somebody's feet unless she has a gun?"

"I don't know," I says dubiously. "I only have a feelin' it is not so simple as you think, Moriarty."

"It is no wonder Alvin gets nowheres in this business, captain," Hambone says sourly.

A cop comes in. He says that there is a citizen to see Moriarty. His name is Buford Tansy.

"Yeah, send him in," Moose Nose says.

BUFORD TANSY shuffles in as if he expected to get hit with a sandbag at any moment. He is a bespectacled snook wearing old baggy tweeds and a soft hat with the brim turned up all the way around. He carries a book under his arm.

"Mr. Moriarty?" Tansy inquires, and shakes a robin's-egg-blue hanky from his breast pocket and dabs at his nose.

"Yeah," Moose Nose admits. "What's on your mind, Buster?"

"Why, I heard the terrible news about an hour ago," Tansy says. "Mr. Gooch was my employer and a friend of long standing. I came here to see

if there is anything I can do to help bring his murderer to justice. I should like to cooperate in any way. I—" The book slips out from under his arm and falls to the floor. I pick it up and glance at the title. It is *A Tea Rose in Brooklyn.*

"Oh, thank you," Tansy says as I hand it to him. "If there is any information I can divulge, captain . . ."

"Not right now, pal," Moriarty says. "We'll contact you if we need you. Thanks for comin'."

"Oh, this is all so terrible," the snook says, and goes out.

It is just two o'clock when me and Hambone and Moriarty enter an apartment not far from the Woodlawn railroad station. We are admitted by the maid who is now in her working scenery. She brings us right to Mrs. Gooch.

The widow is a tall number in a tailored suit who does not look too bad at all despite a rough battle with Father Time. Her eyes tell us she is ready for the old third degree.

"I've been expecting the police much sooner than this," Mrs. Gooch says. "Sit down, gentlemen."

"You, too, Hambone," I says.

"Let's have it, sister," Moriarty snaps.

"I see that you don't have anything in your head, not even a civil tongue," Mrs. Gooch retorts.

"We're here to arrest you for the murder of your husband," Moose Nose says, "so don't get snooty with me. Did you go there and shoot him last night? It had to be somebody the dog wouldn't bite and that means you or Mrs. Miffen. And you had a very good motive. You might as well confess as your maid give us an earful."

"Oh, she did?" Mrs. Gooch says icily, glaring at the cute domestic.

"Yeah, she told us about you figurin' on goin' to your husband and shootin' yourself dead at his feet. But instead, you made a switch, sister," Moose Nose says sternly. "Where's the gun?"

"I never had one," Mrs. Gooch says. "I never really meant what I said to my maid Vyvette. I was unstrung. I'll admit I went to talk to Fillmore last night. It was around nine o'clock and we had it hot and heavy. If I'd had a gun I would have killed him." She turns on the maid. "You were in a hurry to talk to the police weren't you, you little faker? Maybe you'd better tell the detectives where you were last night? Maybe you killed my husband. Maybe that's where you got the mink coat and the diamond earrings, Vyvette!"

"It is nobody's business where I got them!" the said says. "I only thought it was my duty—"

"You're fired," Mrs. Gooch says to the doll, then stares at Moriarty. "All right, where's your evidence, mister? There's a dozen women might have had a reason to kill Fillmore. You can't prove that I killed him and you know it. Find that gun I was supposed to have done it with."

"Well?" I inquire. "She has somethin' here."

I'm casually glancing at the books and magazines on a table. There is a compact resting on one of the books and it bears the initials V. J. I try to act very casual as I ask Mrs. Gooch if she knew of Carmencita Del Monico.

"I certainly did. She was the reason Fillmore's love for me cooled," Mrs. Gooch says. "He said he was going to marry her, and I'm quite sure that if he hadn't, that woman would have killed him."

"It looks like we've got to start all over again, Noonan," Moose Nose says. "You sure it wasn't Augie Glotz?"

"Absolutely," I says.

"I didn't ask you, Hinkey!" Moriarty yelps.

"I shall be here when you want me," Mrs. Gooch says.

"Come on, Noonan," Moriarty says. "Hinkey, you report back to the precinct as we won't need you."

"Thank you very much," I says. "Look out the Latin cookie don't pull a knife on you."

I TARRY for a few seconds after Moose Nose and Hambone leave. "What was Mr. Tansy's capacity with the Gooch Garter Company, Mrs. Gooch?"

"Cashier," the widow says.

"Well, well," I muse as I walk away "I am quite certain Carmencita will have a suitable alibi." I go directly to where Mr. Gooch was assassinated and case the house from the street. "The killer escaped over the lawn in back," I deduce under my breath. "There are so many trees about, the neighbors couldn't have noticed anythin'." I make sure that the canine is nowhere in sight when I walk up to the porch of the big house and rap lightly. Mrs. Miffen finally shows.

"You? Did you get the murderer yet?" she asks. When I tell her no, "Not that I'd cry for joy if you did."

"Where's the pooch?" I ask.

"Tied up," she says.

"Mind if I search the grounds, Mrs. Miffen?"

"Go right ahead."

I do. I mooch around for almost half an hour but do not find what I'm looking for. I get glimpse of Tiny in front of a kennel and he bares his choppers at me and drools. He growls low but does not bark. I says to myself that maybe I'll have to prove to Hambone that dogs are quite smart. It occurs to me that maybe the big bone crusher likes to keep scalps like the Indians once did. I walk back to the house and talk with Mrs. Miffen.

"What you say don't make much sense," the old babe sniffs. "But I'll go along with you, Hinkey. But you'll take full responsibility if somebody ends up in a hospital."

"Agreed," I says.

When I get back to the precinct house I only have to wait a few minutes for Moriarty and Hambone Noonan. They have faces longer than income tax blanks, and Moose Nose's cigar is mostly chewing tobacco.

"You find Carmencita?" I asked casually.

"Shuddup, lemonhead," Moriarty bites back.

"Yeah, shahdup!" Hambone echoes.

"She proved where she was all last night—in a reducing gadget at a women's Turkish bath," Moriarty growls. "She said she got a guy with more scratch than Gooch ever had and so changed her mind about killing him. I still say it was Augie Glotz that did it and I'll get a confession outa him 'fore twenty-four hours is up. You two lunkheads get lost."

Hambone follows me outside. He looks quite hurt. "Forget it, pal," I say. "I think I have a way of trappin' the murderer. You just meet me in front of the late Fillmore Gooch's house just after it gets dark—and don't ask no questions. You would like to make a bum out of Moose Nose, wouldn't you?"

"Worst than anythin' I know," Noonan gripes. "I don't think you know what you're doin', Alvin, but I will meet you just the same. It looks like a perfect crime to me."

"If you have an older suit than the one you have on, I would wear it, Noonan."

"I got one, Alvin, I bought before I took off fourteen pounds. It'll look awful baggy on me," Hambone says.

"Perfect!" I says.

"Huh?"

"I mean, you wouldn't like to get a nice suit mussed up, would you?" I ask him. "Well, I have an appointment with a dentist an' will see you later."

It is quite dark when I meet Hambone Noonan in the driveway of the Gooch residence. One light is burning and it comes from the kitchen. I lead Hambone around to the back and knock on a door.

Mrs. Miffen comes out. "Oh, hello, Hinkey " she says.

"We're goin' to look around," I says. "Where the—er—"

"You don't need to worry," the old dame grins. "Just leave Tiny to me."

"Thanks," I says and take Noonan

by the arm. I lead him through a flower garden and out onto the lawn.

"Spooky, ain't it?" Hambone gulps. "Just enough moon to— Alvin, what is the gimmick?"

"Don't ask questions yet," I says. "I am makin' an experiment. I want to see how long it would take a character to run from here across the lawn and up to that line of bushes. When I count three, you start runnin', Hambone."

"Alvin, this is the silliest thing I ever heard of," Noonan protests.

"Look, it would maybe trap a cold-blooded killer," I says. "Come on, Noonan, an' corporate."

"Awright. Start countin' and let's get it over with," Hambone snorts.

WHEN I get to three, Hambone takes off. I almost feel sorry for the guy and shudder at the thought of what could happen to him. He is halfway across the lawn when I whistle. He stops and looks back just as I fall flat on my face. The big pooch, growling down its throat, comes loping along and jumps right over me. I hear a cry of terror from Noonan and as I get to my hands and knees I see Hambone's derby jump off his head and come down in place again.

"A-a-alvin!" Noonan screeches and then whips up the horses.

I am quite positive that Noonan's feet did not make contact with the turf more than three times on the way to the nearest tree, but the pooch is not tarrying to snap at a flea itself. It overtakes Noonan just as he makes a flying leap for a low-hanging limb and fastens its chopper to the seat of his pants.

There is a howl of terror from Hambone and a loud ripping sound and I hold my hands over my eyes for a second. I am quite sure there are now teeth in the law.

When I look once more, Noonan is attached to the tree limb like a sloth. Trotting diagonally back across the

lawn is the canine, proudly bearing its trophy.

"Eureka," I says. "What I have to know is *where?*"

I watch the pooch go to an old summer house about twenty yards away and start digging. I approach with caution, but not enough. The bone crusher spots me and takes off like it is jet propelled, and while I am busting all existing speed records for humans on the way to an old willow tree I heard Hambone laughing.

I realize I cannot make the tree so I reverse my field; clear a privet hedge five feet high and make for Tiny's kennel. There is latticework on one side of the doghouse and I scamper up it and finally reach the roof.

"Mrs. Mi-i-i-iffen!" I yelp. "Ha-a-a-alp!"

The old babe suddenly appears just as the pooch is making practice jumps at the doghouse and getting closer to the roof every time. Mrs. Miffen carries a pan of something in one hand and a chain in the other.

"Come on, Tiny," she coaxes. "That's a nice doggie. Have some nice horsemeat."

The pooch growls with frustration but finally withdraws. Mrs. Miffen attaches one end of the chain to the canine's collar, and the other to a metal ring set near the door of pooch's cabin.

"All right, Hinkey, it is safe to come down," she says. "What did you find out?"

"I'll tell you in a few minutes," I says, getting down from the doghouse roof. "Oh-h, Ha-a-a ambone!"

Noonan finally appears through a break in the privet hedge. He looks quite pale. "I swallered my cigar, Alvin, you crackpot!" he says. "I hope the dog at least got a leg off you."

"I happen to have emerged unscathed," I reply. "Let us go to the summer house and rummage about as I am sure we will find Tiny's trophy room."

Me and Hambone and Mrs. Miffen do just that. I get down on my hands and knees and begin digging into the garden. Pretty soon I unearth several good-sized pieces of cloth.

"Leave us have some light, Noonan," I says. "And here is the seat of your pants . . . And here is another one recently interred and it looks like very cheap material such as would come from a suit presented to a character when he graduates from up the river. Hey, look at this one! Nice tweed stuff, isn't it? Come off a brand new suit as it shows no sign of wear. Hmm, there are other samples of cloth here that have been buried for quite some time and are showin' signs of rot. This looks like a piece of a postman's pants. An' here is a sample of overalls. Hambone, Tiny is quite a savage as we have both found out, and he took scalps and saved them."

"Awright, so what does it prove, Alvin?" Noonan snorts.

"Who the murderer of Mr. Gooch is, that's all," I says. "I will keep this sample of nice tweed. I will throw the book at the criminal, Hambone. It is too bad for him that the pooch broke his leash on that night of all nights."

Mrs. Miffen plops down on an old rustic bench and shakes her old noggin. "To think I laffed at a lot of them radio crime programs, Hinkey," she says. "Compared to you, Mr. Spade Malone is Doctor Christianson. I still got to see."

"Leave us go now, Hambone," I says. "We shall need our rest for what is comin' up."

"I will take the seat of my pants if you don't mind, Alvin," Noonan says. "Have you an old barrel about, Mrs. Miffen?"

I MEET Noonan in front of a building at 135th and Sedgwick at nine A.M. the next morning. We enter a lift inside and are taken up to the Eleventh Floor. A big sign on the

wall greets us as we step out. GOOCH GARTER COMPANY, INC. *Supports The World!*

"This won't be no snap," I says, leading Noonan into the reception room.

A blonde doll looks up at us and sets off her bubble gum. "Whoyouwannasee?" she asks, and we say Mr. Buford Tansy.

"Firs' door to your lef'," the babe says and we go there.

Mr. Tansy lifts his brows higher than usual and seems to recognize us. He asks aren't we the detective persons.

"We are," I says. "When did you visit Mr. Gooch at his home last?"

"About—er—week ago," Tansy replies.

"Is that so?" I retort sternly. "I see you are wearing dark pants with that new tweed coat and I would not say that was proper in such a dignified position as yourn. You was at Gooch's the night he was murdered, Buford Tansy!"

Buford Tansy gets white and the rabbity look hops out of his eyes. "It is a lie and you cannot prove it!" he yelps.

"I have a sample of cloth out of the pants you could not wear today, Tansy," I says coldly. "Tiny chased you after you shot an' killed Gooch. You got tipped off by Mrs. Gooch's maid that Mrs. Gooch was goin' to see her exstranged husband and you saw your chance to cover up dough you swiped from the Gooch Garter Compan to buy minks and diamonds for Vyvette.

"You visited the maid on the morning after Gooch's rubout while Mrs. Gooch was downtown shopping so's you could both compare notes to help pin the rubout on the victim's wife. I saw the book you toted the day you come to the precinct house at Mrs. Gooch's which you was most likely loaning to Vyvette. You might as well come along quiet, Tansy."

"Why—er—this is ridic—it's—why, I never was so insulted in my life!" Tansy says, but he looks pink around the gills.

"Okay, get your hat and we'll accompany you to your quarters, Mr. Tansy," I snap. "It is quite likely you have not got rid of the rompers as how would you know that the Gooch pooch saved pants seats, huh? Anyway, the maid has confessed. An' all we've got to do is get an auditor to check the books."

"Why, that doublecrossin' dame!" Tansy howls, picking up a letter opener a foot long. He flips it like a pro shiv thrower and Hambone ducks just in time and only takes it through the top of his derby.

Tansy then makes a frantic effort to jerk a desk drawer open which I am sure contains a Betsy but I pick the phone off its cradle and bash him on the pate. It is amazing what stamina criminal characters display when cornered. It is not until five minutes later that me and Hambone subdue the snook at the cost of a quart of ink and the metal statuette of a doll modeling Gooch hose supporters.

Buford Tansy is a very repentant and subdued character when we bring him into the presence of Captain Moose Nose Moriarty. Right away he admits the rubout and the embezzlement, figuring we have more proof than we really have.

"I was under a vampire's spell," he gulps. "I didn't know what I was doing half the time. In her hands I was a rag an' a bone an' a hank of hair. Get me a lawyer."

"How did you boys do it?" Moose Nose asks after the cops take Buford Tansy to a cell. The big lug couldn't have looked sourer if he'd been thrown into a barrel of vinegar.

"I just said to myself," I says, "where would I go if I was a pooch that ripped out seats of citizens pants and saved them? An' I went there an' there they were."

Moriarty is pawing his face when a

cop comes out and tells us how Buford is griping. "The poor cluck told me if the cops wasn't so dumb and lucky they would have looked in the glove compartment of Mrs. Gooch's car and found the gat he planted there, an' then they'd never tumbled about maybe he got bit by the pooch."

"Which proves you showboats was just as dumb as all the other cops. I mean—" Moriarty stammers.

"Come on, Hambone," I sniff. "I can't stand sour grapes."



My Money Says Murder

By W. Lee Herrington

(Continued from page 42)

Christine was still alive. He felt that Libby and Ray Stoner had him next on the list.

The last I saw of Libby Reeves, she was still pondering the thing. They never proved she had a hand in my wife's murder, even as a conspiracy. Libby got her lumps, though. The dough turned out to be tied up in some sort of Australian capital that couldn't be taken out of the country. She had to go to Australia to enjoy it.

Libby wouldn't like Australia. Not without Ray Stoner. He can't go with her, though. They pulled him through an emergency operation to get the slug I had put in him. That way, he can win the jackpot pay-off. In the gas chamber. Mac was right about Ray Stoner. He should have stood in bed and left crime to the lads who understand it.

And to think they used to call me

SKINNY!

Give Me 15 Minutes A Day And I'll Give You A NEW BODY

PEOPLE used to laugh at my skinny, 97 lb. body. I was so embarrassed at my weakling build that I was ashamed to strip for sports or for a swim. Girls snickered and made fun of me behind my back. THEN I discovered my marvelous new muscle-building system—*"Dynamic Tension."* And it turned me into such a *complete* specimen of MANHOOD that today I hold the title "THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

That's how I traded in my "bag of bones" for a barrel of muscle! And I felt so much better, so much on *top of the world* in my big, new, husky body, that I decided to devote my whole life to helping other fellows change themselves into "perfectly developed men."

CHARLES ATLAS
Holder of title, "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

WHAT'S MY SECRET?

When you look in the mirror and see a healthy, husky, strapping fellow smiling back at you—then you'll be astonished at how *short* a time it takes *"Dynamic Tension"* to GET RESULTS!

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Thousands of other fellows are becoming marvelous physical specimens—my way. I give you no gadgets or contraptions to fool with. When you have learned to develop your strength through *"Dynamic Tension,"* you can laugh at artificial muscle-makers. You simply utilize the dormant muscle-power in your own body—watch it increase and m u l t i p l y into real, solid L I V E MUSCLE.

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